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Management 101: The challenge of change

Change is the law of life, and those who look only to the past or the present are certain to miss the future.”
— John F. Kennedy

Change is unavoidable in today’s business environment. Individuals, managers and companies have a choice — be controlled by and reactive to changes in their environments; or be proactive, and manage the change process to maximize benefits and reduce negative impacts.

The world of work is changing every day. These changes are profound and will affect every organization and every level of personnel. Globalization, diversification, new technologies, the grow-

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ing wealth of nations, increasing value of time, new competitive standards — all these factors are radically changing the way business is done today.

In addition to those factors, how we work; where we work; the relationship we have with our bosses, staff and peers; how we are paid; all of these elements and more are changing. If we are to survive, we need to prepare ourselves for change, enhance our skills for dealing with it.

One of the things I have always found so interesting about organizational change is people tend to get really overwhelmed by it. We also tend to put limitations on ourselves about what we are really capable of doing.

For example, an organization introduces new policies, a new management structure and new methods for perform-

ing tasks. People get excited. You hear them saying, “Oh my gosh, we’re going to structure ourselves differently! You mean I’m going to have a new boss? You mean my hours are going to be different? You mean I have to learn to operate a new piece of technology?”

In today’s society, the ability to change the world is there. It’s just a matter of seeing the tea leaves and having the vision and the will to do it. Having the courage to take quantum leaps in dealing with the entire change process — getting out of our comfort zone and finding new ways to do things, new ways to make change happen successfully.

Times of change and transition provide you with an opportunity to do some remarkable things. You need to encourage yourself and your staff to demonstrate more initiative and resourcefulness rather than being too resistive, too reactive and too closely tied to old habits. You want to be in a position where you’re managing change instead of having it manage you.

A major task of a manager, then, is to effectively manage and communicate change. The following six guidelines should aid you in your endeavors to lead your team through change.

1. Success in the change environment requires you, the manager, be flexible and adaptable. Fight against backsliding. Celebrate the new; bury the past.

2. Organizational change usually creates a high level of uncertainty for all involved. You need to manage change in such a way you minimize the ambiguity and clear up the unknown as much as possible. Communicate and educate before, during and after the change implementation. This

process can involve one-on-one discussions, group presentations, memos and reports.

3. Set boundaries for change. What will stay the same, what will be different, what has already been decided and what will be decided later?

4. Careful planning and organizing is essential during time of change. One way of maximizing effectiveness is to operate with clearly defined, attainable goals. Once these goals have been established, you must do a good job of communicating them to the employees who will be responsible for their achievement. Generous feedback and support is also a must for your staff; it pumps them up and builds confidence.

5. Communicate relentlessly and continuously. Transform resistance into support for the change. Keep in mind communication is a two-way street. Provide a variety of opportunities for employee input. Be available. Get opinions and reactions to the change. Strive to be specific rather than vague, candid rather than guarded. Clear up rumors and misinformation that clutter the information channels. The more you communicate, the fewer problems you will have.

6. Focus on the payoffs, not the pain. Ask, “What and how can we gain?” Give shape and dimension to the change.

I encourage you to view change as an exciting challenge. View change as the beginning of taking bold steps for you, your staff and organization to achieve success.

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