



Uncertainty and Change

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It is not uncommon to hear, “The only constant around here is change.” A supplier goes out of business, there’s a need for a change in structure, an introduction of a new product or initiative, a need to replace and update technology, or seasonal employees have to leave early. Leaders in every enterprise are being asked to successfully navigate and lead change. For some, the change is at an alarming pace.

Just because change is coming at an alarming pace doesn’t mean that change is always successful. Two-thirds of large scale change efforts fail according to CEB-- a best practice insight and Technology Company. Discussions with managers that have been heavily involved in successful change management highlight three things in particular.



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Tip of the Month

Bucket Filling as a Leadership Competency

I recently came across a blog about “bucket filling as a leadership competency.” It’s a metaphor I’ve used in my time management class for some time. It’s a pretty simple concept really. We all have invisible buckets that we carry around. When they are full we are happy and energized; when they are empty we are sad and exhausted. When we help others, show kindness, exhibit patience and appreciation, we fill other’s buckets. When we are mean, impatient, rude, or uncaring, we dip into their buckets.

I appreciated that Robyn McLeod, the author of the blog, was curious to learn the origin of the concept of “bucket filling” and “bucket dipping.” Merrill Lundgren is known as The Bucket Man, and the person who brought the bucket filling concept to schools. Back in the 1970s Lundgren attended a presentation at his company where the speaker talked about bucket filling and bucket

dipping. He was so moved by the idea that he quit his job and became a motivational speaker on quality of life. Years later he was asked to speak at a middle school and The Bucket Man was born. Today the Bucket Filler philosophy has spread to schools across the country.

What if bucket filling became the latest leadership competency, and conversations in the workplace turned to what we each are doing to fill our co-workers’, managers’, and customers’ buckets? How would that impact our experience at work and the level of employee engagement in organizations? A focus on others before we focus on ourselves is a premise that is found throughout current thinking on what constitutes strong leadership. John Maxwell’s The Law of Connection, in his 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, advises leaders to touch a heart before they ask for a hand. Daniel Goleman’s work on emotional intelligence supports the idea that leaders who are able to self-manage and develop superior interpersonal skills are most successful. A similar concept is Stephen Covey’s Emotion-

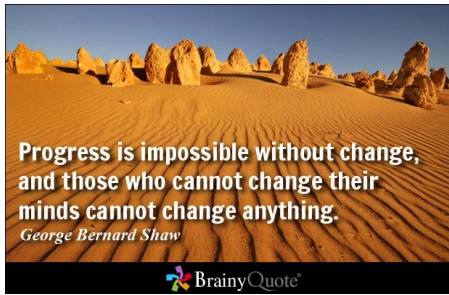
al Bank Account which illustrates the benefits of making deposits of positive actions in a relationship in order to build up against any withdrawals that come with negative behaviors toward another.

When I think about what fills my bucket, these things come to mind:

- A “greeting” with a smile
- Simple courtesies, ie. holding a door open, offer to help
- A genuine thank you
- Undivided attention during a conversation
- A call back
- A personal note or call
- Honest and caring feedback
- A good laugh

It’s not just a concept for kids! What would our enterprise be if we all commit to focusing more on being a bucket filler and setting an example of creating a culture of bucket filling within the workplace?

What fills your bucket at work? What are ten things you can do tomorrow to fill someone else’s bucket?



“Our coping mechanisms with fear of failure can be traced back to our schooling.”

- The sponsor or “owner” of the change project isn’t just engaged with the project and has a desire to make a success of it, they also have the necessary organizational knowledge and change management skills to make it succeed.
- All roles and responsibilities about the change are clearly laid out, and all communications to employees are equally clear.
- The processes to manage groups of employees are designed to support the change. Individuals understand which teams they are assigned to and roles are clear.

It would be simple if leaders always knew what to do and how to do it. According to Amy Fox, President, CEO and founder of Accelerated Business Results, “half of companies worldwide say their leaders are not ready to lead into the future.”

As humans, we love to control everything. We will do almost anything to avoid feeling uncertain, but sometimes it’s just unavoidable. Uncertainty can feel unsettling, yet it’s essential for growth. When faced with a challenging period of change in your life, ask yourself: What is the lesson I need to learn right now? And what do I need to face and conquer?

- Is difficulty training a new employee teaching you the patience to develop intergenerational communication skills?
- Is uncertainty about a relationship teaching you to be more honest?
- Is an industry trend forcing you to really put yourself and your enterprises goals out there?
- Is a financial shift requiring you to prioritize your financial goals?

Honestly look at the issue at hand. Is what you are dealing with fear of failure or fear of change? It’s possible to move beyond fearing change and learn to relish and welcome it. The trick is to embrace the uncertainty, learn the lesson from it and come up with a solution in the face of it. Get into a plan instead of being paralyzed and stuck. Henry Ford once said, “an obstacle is what you see when you take your eyes off of the goal.”

Our coping mechanisms with fear of failure can be traced back to our schooling. Imagine you are 9 years old and your teacher has asked the class to name the countries around the Adriatic Sea. You don’t have an answer. What do you do? You take a profound interest in the desktop in front of you, of course! The kids who know, wave; the kids who don’t, look elsewhere. This particular piece of conditioning is experienced enough times by most children in their school years to create a powerful survival instinct and creates a learned behavior which for many lasts throughout adulthood. If you don’t know, don’t show.

Fast-forward that nine-year-old, now grown up, into an executive meeting in a business facing uncertainty. Someone asks a question that is the sophisticated equivalent of “Name a country in the Adriatic Sea.” What is everyone’s instinct that doesn’t have a good answer? All too often, it’s “Don’t attract attention,” and “Don’t show that you don’t know.”

In the reality of the world we live in, a profound interest in our desk top is absolutely the wrong response. We want people who will recognize their lack of knowledge and lead the way to find a better answer, to head into the difficult learning, no matter what the history, and to help the enterprise devise value from the process.



We can never escape change, but we can learn to manage it well. Managing change means you bring people together during a time of transition. Major change is difficult to accomplish without a key leader guiding the direction. Often, the change leader will focus on results as much or more than activities necessary for the change process. Strategically gathering an aligned team behind a compelling vision supported by a strong change leader is key to successful change strategies. Leading change requires several characteristics:

Visionary:

- ...imagines the future; focuses on results
- ...is articulate and communicates well
- ...is a strategic thinker
- ...is a risk taker; challenges the status quo.

Inspiring:

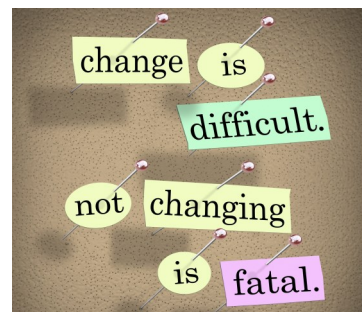
- ...sells the vision, benefits, and what can be
- ...is genuine & passionate; evokes followers to get on board
- ...engages others; builds alliances across the organization
- ...trusts others; is trusted.

Enthusiastic

- ...energizes others to overcome barriers
- ...involves others; is collaborative
- ...is open to others' ideas; allows for mistakes
- ...rewards and appreciates others.

Wise

- ...has knowledge of organizations, politics, people, and processes
- ...analyzes and understands data; develops solutions
- ...anticipates and addresses issues
- ...solves problems.



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