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Messenger

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Communication Plans for Change

Communication is critical for driving change forward. Plans might be clear to the upper management who created them, but those same plans often become muddled as they move farther down the organization. Creating a communication strategy helps the entire organization work to prevent this from happening.

When major changes are taking place, the rumor mill will tend to run riot as staff members tell different stories they have heard about the future state of the organization. If we do not communicate effectively, the rumors will increase. False reports may push the organization into a state of paralysis. Rumors can lead to organized opposition toward the change initiatives. Having a communication plan in place for changes will greatly reduce the fear and opposition that often accompanies change.

Communication helps everyone plan his or her direction

Senior managers often assume each employee knows the future plan and is clear on the direction in which the company is moving. Too often, front line employees actually know very little about the plans that will affect their work. Deliberate and effective communication will allow personnel in all parts of the organization plan for the coming changes.

Communication creates vision for people to follow

An important aspect of organizational change is creating an appealing vision of the future. That vision will help drive the change process if it is shared by everyone involved in bringing the ideal

future state into existence. Staff in all areas of the organization can assist upper management in driving change if they know the direction. Such knowledge only comes as a result of effective communication.

Communication creates parameters for measuring productivity

Middle-level supervisors are normally responsible for carrying out the practical aspects of change. Their participation is critical, but the parameters of the desired change must be communicated to them in a clear and precise fashion. Communication must take place across multiple channels and must utilize various methods if it is to achieve the best results. The more methods of communication you use, the faster you are likely to see the change implemented. Multiple channels of communication contribute to greater clarity and helps reduce resistance. Below are some possible means of conveying your message about the change plan.

Memos and written notices - Memos and written notices are traditional means of communication. Most staff members see these on a daily basis and feel comfortable with them. However, this method is limited in its effectiveness because it does not allow for non-verbal communication, which clarify understanding by both the sender and the receiver of the message.

What would it be like if we had no courage to attempt anything?

Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890)

Artist

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Town Hall Meetings - Town hall meetings are held to facilitate an open discussion of ideas and information. Staff are invited to participate. Flyers announcing the meeting usually identify the topic for discussion. It is important to make the town hall meeting very specific in its focus. Visual aids can be used to explain what is happening and the impact it will likely have on the staff. It is also important for upper management to be positive in its message, but not to the point of distorting information. Distortion will destroy the leadership's credibility in the eyes of the staff and undermine the value of future town hall meetings. At the conclusion of the meeting,

allow staff members to ask questions. Each question should be answered truthfully and with correct data. It is desirable to have the entire core change team participate in order to answer specific questions in their areas of responsibility.

In our next issue, we will look at five additional ways to convey your message about the change plan.

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