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The Secrets to Successful Change Management

In today's business environment, one fact that remains true is that change is constant. Change is required to remain competitive. The key to success is to manage change better than your competition.

In the last several years, I've seen a multitude of examples of companies going through change - the implementation of a new enterprise-wide system, a company sale process, a company turnaround, double digit sales growth, business process change and improvement, etc. This trend is only increasing as Executives realize that change is not only a necessary evil but is also required to support continued and improved business results.

Based on my experience with multiple companies in multiple industries in managing change, I've uncovered a few secrets that apply to all of them in how to manage change while achieving positive results. Communication is the obvious path to success; however, the secret is in the communication process, material etc.

First, explain the whys. This might sound obvious but it is often overlooked. Begin by communicating about the change - why is it required? What if we don't change? Why is it important to the company goals? Once people understand why, they can accept the change. I've found that the opposite of the common thinking of "people don't like change" to be true - so long as people understand the change and are communicated with proactively, they are typically fine with change - and many are even excited about it.

Second, communicate the plan. It doesn't matter if you have a detailed plan; just communicate the basics - what is happening, what are the likely next steps, how will the change affect them, etc. Don't worry about what you don't know. Just tell them what you know and what you are able to communicate at this time, and let them know that you will communicate as you know more - and do what you say you will do. If it is a sensitive subject matter such as a company sale, communicate what you are able to tell them and let them know that there are elements of the process that you cannot share but that as you are able to share additional information, you will. The critical part is that they know that you will communicate what you can when you can - this avoids the large issue that arises when people with missing information fill in the gaps with what they think (and it is almost always much worse than reality - and it definitely results in significant roadblocks to success).

Third, listen. Provide a vehicle for people to communicate their concerns, ideas etc. You don't have to have all the answers; just listen. Listening is an undervalued and underused skill - use it! You'll be surprised by the results - the key is to truly listen. Don't think about your next appointment or what you'll have for dinner. Focus your attention on listening.

I've heard feedback that these secrets sound "too simple". My response to that is "great" - I've found that it doesn't matter if it is simple or complex. The result is what matters, and these secrets "work". Why waste time with a complicated and hard to understand process if you can achieve the same results or better ones following a simple one?

Lisa's Tips: Ideas to increase cash flow

1. It's not what you make; it's what you keep: As obvious as this sounds, it is easy to get caught up in the opposite of what will increase your cash flow - increasing your revenue with a commensurate increase in costs. Instead, focus on continually increasing the difference between the two.
2. Increase your revenue: Continually think about ways to increase your revenue. Aside from the obvious ways to increase sales, are there some creative ways to increase your top line? Can you increase your value to your customers? Can you be more selective of the types of customers you sell to? Have a brainstorming session with your management team - a few "gems" might appear.
3. Decrease your costs: Is there a way to maintain your revenue and yet decrease your costs? It is critical to find creative ways to decrease costs while not impacting service, quality etc. Look at things in a new way - ask someone outside your normal "circle of people" to throw out radical ideas to get the discussion started.
4. Decrease other items such as inventory, financing charges, and asset purchases etc: If your business is one that carries inventory, every dollar of inventory directly affects your cash flow. Of course, you'll need some level of inventory; however, minimize it. For every dollar not invested in inventory, you could use that dollar to generate additional business or for some other productive pursuit. The same philosophy is true for evaluating asset purchases, etc. The key is to evaluate each with the total picture in mind - not just from one angle.

Recommended Reading

["The Carolina Way: Leadership Lessons from a Life in Coaching"](#) by Dean Smith and Gerald D. Bell - since I'm an alumni of Carolina, of course, I consider it a classic. However, regardless of your school choice, it provides several coaching lessons, which can be directly applied to the business world in an easy-to-read format with real-life examples for easy application. For anyone interested in improving upon leadership skills, you'll be able to find at least a few "tips and tricks" to help.

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