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By Rick Boxx

Effective Leaders Embrace and Nurture Change

Writing in the Harvard Business Review, Edith Onderick-Harvey discussed what she called "five behaviors of leaders who embrace change." She expressed the view that 70-90 percent of mergers and acquisitions fail to meet their objectives often because of the reluctance of leaders to accept and embrace necessary change. Since change is inescapable, let's discuss these five behaviors that Onderick-Harvey cites.

The first behavior is to share a compelling, clear purpose. Have you ever had a boss demand something without telling you why? People are more willing to embrace change if they understand the reason that is compelling and clear. As Proverbs 20:5 teaches, "The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out." Wise leaders clarify for themselves - and their team - the purposes for change.

The second behavior is to look ahead and see opportunity. The author contends that all employees should be encouraged to look forward and help surface opportunities. Marion Laboratories founder, Ewing Kaufman, understood the value in engaging his staff in looking forward. The company was famous for holding annual meetings with all staff to announce the winners of the most innovative ideas.

Proverbs 20:12 says, "Ears that hear and eyes that see - the Lord has made them both." The Lord gives each of us eyes and ears to scout out new opportunities. Unleash that quality in your staff and change will go easier.

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The third behavior is to seek out what's not working. There is always a need for discovering problems, but especially when major change is taking place. I once worked for a CEO who started off well. He visited the branches and listened to views from all levels of staff. It didn't take long, however, before this CEO isolated himself. There were many significant problems he rarely heard about.

In *Proverbs 28:22* we are told, *"Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe."* When change is in your midst, make sure your staff feels safe to express their concerns.

The fourth behavior is to promote calculated risk taking and experimentation. When confronted with risky opportunities, many organizations tend to ask, "Why?" Companies that handle change well tend to ask, "Why not?" Without the opportunity to take calculated risks and to fail occasionally, innovation will be stifled.

God gave man the freedom to make mistakes, even big mistakes. In *Genesis 2*, *God said, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."* To manage change well, give your staff the freedom to innovate and take reasonable risks without fear of reprisal.

The fifth behavior is to look for boundary-spanning partnerships. Many businesses have departments or "silos" that hinder a unified approach to advancing the business. A large bank was implementing a major technology change that was going to impact many different departments. A team was formed that included key people from each of the departments. This approach allowed us to learn and address the unique challenges for each department, bringing a unified resolution to the problem.

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Psalm 133:1 says, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" Boundary-spanning partnerships can help your organization strive toward greater overall unity.

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Reflection/Discussion Question

1. Do leaders in your organization - including yourself - seem to welcome and facilitate change, or do they seem to make changes more difficult to implement than necessary? Explain your answer.
2. What is the difference between viewing change as a problem - or an opportunity?
3. Why is it important to not only effectively communicate what changes must be made and why, but also give everyone affected the opportunity to respond, ask questions and express concerns they may have throughout the process?
4. How do you understand what is meant by "calculated risk taking and experimentation," and what are the positives and negatives of encouraging this approach to change?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

*Psalm 37:4-5; Isaiah 43:18-19
Proverbs 3:5-6, 11:14, 15:22, 16:3, 19:20-21, 20:18, 27:1*

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