LEADERSHIP AMIDST CHAOS: HOW GREAT MANAGERS TRANSCEND CHAOS, LEAN ECONOMIC TIMES, AND LEAD THEIR STAFF TO SUCCESS

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ABSTRACT

We are living in an era with some of the worst leaders in the history of business in the United States. During challenging economic times this leads to: greed, hubris, unethical behavior, poor relationship development, weak leadership styles, inadequate employee engagement and empowerment, as well as despicable behavior and treatment of employees. This will then lead to decreased productivity and eventually disaster. The impetus inevitably falls on the leader to figure out how to manage successfully amidst chaos. This paper explores ways to accomplish this through challenging times without being ruthless or demeaning.

KEYWORDS: Leadership, Effective Leadership, Management Styles

INTRODUCTION

Check Your Ego and Empower, Empower, Empower

One cannot know everything and it is impossible to know all. Leaders will need other people to survive the chaos. Arrogance and ego do not work, so this means you will have to follow a basic leadership principle. You need to build relationships with people and put others ahead of yourself. Leaders need to give employees a sense of control and allow them to feel they are making a difference. In a crisis, leaders make sure everyone is focused, engaged, and empowered (Reid, 2010).

Let your people fly and brainstorm ideas freely and without fear of reprisal. This will build honest and forthright communication which is essential in any leadership relationship. This enables you to work through a process where you all are coming up with ideas together as a team. This in turn builds a strong sense of community amongst your department. Give them the freedom to try new things that includes change orientated behavior and innovation. It is critical to make sure everyone understands values and ethics and follows them to the letter. An explicit expectation ensures that no one strays off into an alternate company reality or commits illegal acts or ethical violations, which can make the organization disreputable. Include everyone, bring them into the company circle, do not leave anyone out, and never point fingers. The key is to promote an atmosphere where everyone is in this together. This also fosters trust, which is a vital ingredient in building relationships with people (Reid, 2010).

To enable us to circumnavigate the current challenges and position ourselves to flourish in the future, leaders must help people change, innovate, and take risks. Beneficial change can be promoted in many ways such as: business strategy, leadership, organization, products, and customer service. Crisp, clear communication in and out of the business builds understanding and elicits ideas that are essential to success (Reid, 2010).

The Servant Leader: The Guiding Coalition

Being a servant leader means always being the leadership expert. It's the old adage "know when to lead and know when to get out of the way." Do not micromanage, simply check in with your folks on a periodic and consistent basis by asking, "is there anything you need, how may I help you?" Be visible around the organization; build relationships by putting a face to your position. Know your business by keeping up with the times and trends of the industry at all times. This allows for leading edge technology that enables business to create and attain goals that bring the organizations closer to their mission and vision. Strong servant leaders are emotionally intelligent and resilient leaders, who articulate strategic intent, clarify roles, align goals, and empower people to act. When this is realized, highly talented cohesive teams are created with well-matched capacities and tasks. The results are strong implementation focus, emphasis on strong project management, and overall sustainment of the business (Reid, 2010).

Creating a guiding coalition with enough power and influence to get people to change is crucial to leading in challenging times. Some key points are bringing those together with enough capability to lead change and focus the group. Great servant leaders get everyone to work together using emotional intelligence to guide the team and make sure everyone is: getting along, getting appreciated, getting it right, and getting it done. A good servant leader embraces the previous concepts in making sure that to get it done, take care to get it done right; if you want it done right, and avoid complications by making sure everyone is getting along. For a team effort to succeed, each party must be valued and appreciated (Brinkman & Kirschner, 2012). Finally, you must gather three essential players with the following attributes: position powers – must be key players from throughout all levels, expertise – someonewith various points of views, and credibility – must have good reputations and values, and proven leadership (Reid, 2010).

Getting Control: That Sense of Urgency

The only way to get control is by sharing it with others (Kaplan & Norton, 2010). This is a classic business statement that is truer now than it was 15 years ago. Fear chills minds and kills companies and leading by fear in today's environment simply does not work. When employees have confidence and do not feel threatened, you will benefit when they do great work. This means you must empower them to do their job with proper training, motivation, and an excellent work environment. Workplace atmosphere is vital. When employees go to work each day fearful and apprehensive, productive intent suffers and so do the goals of the organization. It is astounding that some leaders really believe that making the office a "living hell" will provide for a favorable setting for productivity. This, of course, is far from the truth. These types of settings breed distrust, disloyalty, massive turnover, low productivity, and increased legal action. Great leaders go beyond the abnormal psychology of office politics and give their employees control over their work checking with them from time to time to see if they need any support (Reid, 2010).

Establishing a sense of urgency is crucial in gaining needed cooperation (Kaplan & Norton, 2010). One must set the tone and make sure their staff knows that change is inevitable for the company to survive. This tactic is not meant to instill fear in employees, but instead to be a catalyst in making the workforce understand that change must be made and it must be made very soon. As a team, one must examine the market and competitive realities and make some tough decisions so jobs are ensured for the next 5 years, 10 years, or even 20 years. Leaders with the help of their employees must identify and discuss immediate crises, potential crises, or major opportunities. In essence, we must determine what we are doing right and what we are doing wrong. Change requires great cooperation, initiative, and willingness to make

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sacrifices from all stakeholders.

Communicating the Change Vision

This will be one of the most important things you do. It can galvanize the institution into a succinct, focused, and a synchronized force of action. Leaders must use every vehicle possible to constantly communicate the new vision and strategies. Then, once the vehicle is put into motion, one must have the guiding coalition model the behavior expected of the employees. Keep it simple by employing "Occam's Razor" which states: if there are multiple possible explanations for an event or result, the simplest is almost always correct. This ensures that the message is loud, clear, and understood by all. Use metaphor, analogy, parable, and example in all communication to have a more direct effect that will leave people remembering your message. Use multiple forums such as face to face communication, email, WEBX, conference calls, and regular mail to get your point across and use repetition. Have your audience read it, say it, write it, and do it. Most importantly, lead by example because employees tend to mimic your behavior (Harkins, 2010).

Don't Take Advantage

Do not take advantage of low turnover and a tight job market to exploit your employees just because you can. Exploit your employees now and they will take revenge the first chance they get. Generation "Y" can retaliate in a technical way to bring your system down or expose sensitive information to share with the world. This also leads to mistrust, devastation, low morale, decreased productivity, general malaise, disengagement, and then general death for the organization. The leader's unprincipled behavior will put forth a wave of suspicion, cynicism, and skepticism that will wreak havoc within the very core of the organization. Especially in hard times, this is the instance to treat employees with respect and as valued members of the team by always thinking of their needs first (Uba, 2011).

Decisiveness

In this chaotic and competitive market we must be decisive. You may have seen those who wait for information before making a decision, then need more information to support the information they already have, then need a committee to analyze the information (Uba, 2011). Sadly, at that point the decision makes itself, and it is usually not the best decision for the organization as a whole. Great leaders make decisions based on past experience as well as quantitative information. We must make the best decision for that place in time or the competition will. Good things happen when you take action; you grow, you adapt, you learn, and your team grows in this same way. The worst quality you can show your team is indecision as it is a sure sign of weakness, not knowing your business, or just plain fear. If you are that fearful your staff will follow suit. There is no perfect time to make a decision and there never will be. Good leaders make the decision and go for it based on the best information at hand (Uba, 2011).

Vision

Vision is the ability to see what others do not or will not see. Outstanding leaders can not only see their team for what they can do, but what they can become. You may have to paint the picture for them and certainly this is the best way to get them to see it. These leaders are consistently in communication and coach their team members to attain that vision. It is, in a sense, leading them down the "Yellow Brick Road" to the "Emerald City;" it can be powerful and engaging. These leaders are consistently communicating and coaching their team members to that vision on a daily basis. Develop the team

member's personal vision, help them with their personal goals and then tie them into the organization's vision. Through this technique, you will foster joint success between the organization and the staff member (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

Allow for the Natural Reaction of Your Staff and Allow Yourself Support

Regardless of the challenge, you need to allow for your employees to share their feelings. During this process, realize that everyone has a different perspective and has a unique process for dealing with the situation at hand. Take the time to talk to employees individually, if possible, or in groups, and create a space where they can be open. If you do not, employees may feel unimportant and will not want to move past the initial phase of resistance. Once you allow your employees to get their feelings out, they will start to move forward (Kerfoot, 2003).

Sometimes the hardest thing for most leaders to do is to receive support from their employees (Kerfoot, 2003). Realize that you often see your staff at their best during a challenge. They will step up to the plate and take on more responsibility. This will also bring them into the work circle where they will feel more engaged and empowered. So rather than think you need to do everything yourself and keep you feelings bottled up, delegate tasks and share feelings with employees in a positive way. As long as you are honest, your staff may want to help in any way they can. This also breeds a sense of community which helps employees feel a sense of interconnectivity that can lead to better communication and productivity (Kerfoot, 2003).

Lead Your Organization beyond the Challenge

If you allow for support from your employees, then your staff may feel that they are important and that they have the power to make serious change. Most individuals do not want to feel left out. Being included is a basic human need and will foster great organizational benefits (Laff, 2008). At this point, you need to identify the opportunities that are apparent. If you have listened to your staff, chances are, they will point out new ideas you may never have thought out. No matter how limited you may feel, your options are at this point to stay positive and proactive; you will then push through to better time (Laff, 2008).

A slowdown is actually a good time to reconfirm your organization's purpose and vision. Determine which core values and processes will help the company through the downturn. Suspend or eliminate initiatives that may not improve the position of the institution once the economy is back on track. Take advantage of this time to retool and sharpen your saws in order to realize greater capability during the next boom (Laff, 2008).

CONCLUSIONS

Finally, have fearless enthusiasm; the economic downturn does not need to paralyze your organization with fear and anxiety. Be strong, focused, relentless in your conviction, and kind to everyone. Stay on track and adapt when you hit the bumps in the road and stay positive. Remember that vulnerability can breed great growth, if handled correctly (Arkell, 2008). Keep in mind that if you want control, you are going to have to give it up (Kaplan & Norton, 2010).

Leading in challenging times is an arduous process, to say the least. But, if we keep our values and ethics facing true north and treat everyone with respect and appreciation, it is possible to be successful and come out of the economic lethargy. It will take incredible focus and a seamless understanding of your current market situation and internal processes, but it can be done.

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