



THE COACHING CORNER



More Than “Managing” During Change

[By Barbara A. Kay, M.A., L.P.C., R.C.C.]

Change management is a hot topic. There are change management consultants, change management systems, and coaches who help people handle change. With all of that expertise available, it can still feel like we are just barely managing during change. In some cases, those feelings are exactly right.

Recently, I conducted a workshop within a worldwide organization. The folks in this organization had been put through an endless roller coaster of change in a brief period. The top leader had changed more than once, vice presidents and director level leaders had changed multiple times. The direction of the organization had changed 180° and then completely reversed within two years. Even the target market and preferred customers were constantly shifting. These folks had experienced change overload. Change overload occurs when employees spend 30% or more of their time on change-related tasks. I imagine this company was way over that 30% mark.

Surprisingly, the group treasured their organization, and were amazingly committed. They desperately wanted to succeed. Until our workshop, they didn't realize they had already won several key battles. The first battle of any change situation is harnessing a desire to succeed. These folks still were committed to success even after being spun around on a “tilt o wheel” of organizational change. They had the drive to move forward, the first big win!

The second big win was their sincere appreciation for their staff and a keen interest in supporting staff needs. Most organizations spend time planning for system changes and

little or no time planning for the impact of change on people. These mid-level managers did not have the authority to stop the roller coaster, but they had a sincere desire to minimize any unnecessary damage. They had a vital quality for leaders in change, a genuine concern for people.

The third victory was their realistic yet hopeful attitude. There was no pretending that the environment was easy. They had a no-nonsense understanding of their pain and the pain of their staff. At the same time, they had a driving optimism and were confident that perseverance would bring success. An important attitude in change success is “realistic optimism”. Having a realistic but hopeful view during change is a potent yet practical motivator. These folks were already there.

Finally, they had adopted a powerful change leadership attitude. These managers understood the power of their influence. Instead of whining about what “the leadership” should do, they pumped me for information on how they could lead their staff through the mess. They were true change leaders. Change leaders create positive influence at all levels in the organization.

This group had achieved key victories even before I reached them. It felt like they were just

“managing.” In reality, they were a long way toward success. I tried my best to bring some first aid to these embattled change warriors. During our time together they learned additional skills for the final push forward. Equally important, we celebrated their success in “managing” the turmoil of the last years.

Change is not easy. Dramatic and repeated changes are especially challenging. When you think that you are barely managing, take stock. You may be doing much better than you realize. Are you committed to success and moving forward? Are you caring for your team and minimizing their disruption as much as possible? Are you being a positive leader from your position in the company? Do you have realistic optimism about the future? If so, pat yourself on the back! You are doing much more than just managing. You are well on your way to succeeding. Keep going and add more skills to assure the win. Finally, celebrate every success! It will help you and your team feel better and create energy to drive forward to change victory.

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