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Empower Talent to Become Leaders Who Drive Change

Helping employees aspire to be leaders who drive change begins with valuable career development initiatives.

by Rita Balian Allen October 26, 2018

The only constant today is change. Change does not happen overnight. It's a process that takes strategy, planning and deliberation. It requires an understanding of the reason for the change along with clear communication and transparency of the execution of that strategy.

It begins with the openness to embrace change as a good thing. We can face resistance to change quite often. There are many reasons for that resistance: fear of the unknown, loss of control, perceived risks and/or personal discomfort, among others.

What if employees could view change as a positive and adapt a new mindset of change as a necessity for the realization of new possibilities and opportunities? Accepting change as the foundation of progress moving forward is essential and being optimistic to its rewards can benefit all.

Establishing a culture that invites all employees to be a part of leading the change is key for this kind of success. Reinforcing the premise that agility is a part of developing the self and others, enabling employees to take risks and being open to pushing out of one's comfort zone helps cultivate a culture that embraces change. An organizational culture that espouses and enacts behaviors that reinforce an openness to change leads the way for change. It embodies the message that change is a necessity for progress and innovation.

Employees understand the "what" and the "why" and are an integral part of planning the "how." They see the opportunities along with the rewards, while determining and planning through the risks and obstacles. When there is this level of investment and engagement, employees begin to build momentum and yield results.

In today's global marketplace, there are several demands that require all professionals to embrace and welcome change as a necessity. We have consistently changing demographics, multicultural reach, remote and virtual work along with numerous other realities of today's workplace. Flexibility and agility are required, along with the openness to creative and innovative solutions.

Employers need to be positioned to empower their talent to become drivers of change and must be comfortable leading change on a regular basis. It's important to keep in mind that one does not have to be in a leadership role to be a leader. Leadership sets the tone for driving change. They communicate the reason behind the need for change and model behaviors and actions that are aligned with that need. Those behaviors include collaboration, teamwork and initiating and engaging practices that create new norms where everyone contributes in the creation and implementation of change.

Taking risks without fear is part of the change process. After all, some of the best learning comes from mistakes. Establishing norms that encourage employees to take risks and take on challenges with an openness to learning through the process contributes to a culture that cultivates change rather than fears or resists it. All employees can play a role in exuding the passion, purpose and inspiration necessary to achieve the vision desired. When leadership leads the change process with integrity, transparency and ongoing communication, it entices and sets the example for all to follow.

Effectively driving change requires the following competencies:

- Trust and credibility — building a strong foundation of trust, respect and a track record of delivering.
- Emotional intelligence — high level of self awareness, self management, empathy (social awareness) and relationship management.
- Agility — being comfortable pushing out of one's comfort zone, willing to try new things, managing multiple priorities, flexible to make adjustments as needed.
- Relationship building — strategically and deliberately establishing, building and nurturing long-lasting, mutually rewarding relationships.
- Resilience — persistence and determination, staying focused and motivated, taking risks, learning and continued perseverance, thriving amid adversity.
- Influencing — impacting people, thoughts, decisions, processes and outcomes.

- Networks — contacts, both internal and external, that offer a vast range of connections and resources, allowing for more effectiveness.
- Strategic alliances — partnerships and collaborations that include a mix of having and being mentors, advocates, champions, sponsors and advisors.
- Optimism and positivity — staying upbeat, seeing and expecting the best in situations and people, encouraging positive behaviors and outlook, managing energy effectively, being present, practicing mindfulness.

Helping employees aspire to be leaders who drive change begins with valuable career development initiatives. Enable employees to build strong sense of self: Define their differentiators and identify their personal and leadership brand to be their authentic and best self. When employees gain this level of inner strength, it results in having the confidence to lead with compassion and vulnerability, which are vital components of driving change effectively.

Help employees get comfortable with change through the acronym ACT:

- *Accept* and *acknowledge* the need for change.
- *Communicate* proactively with all parties involved to *clarify* and *comprehend* the process required for the change to be implemented.
- *Thrive* in the progress change brings. *Throw* yourself into the change, keep an open mind, *try* new things, *test* different approaches, *think* about the impact on all, *teach* others your learnings, *tell* all and celebrate.

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