

Article from **Policy Perspectives**

(http://www.imakenews.com/cppa/e_article000642876.cfm?x=b6Gdd3k,b30DNQvw,w)

August 24, 2006

Leading Change

by Ken Embley, CPPA

Hey folks; is it just me, or do others see the hectic rate of change in our lives as accelerating? I think you know what I mean—your IT people announce an up-grade for your computer system. Somehow you knew the up-grade was coming because, for the past few months, you have finally been able to get your head around the last up-grade.

Change is everywhere! My wife and I are meeting friends at a local restaurant. On the way, our cell phone rings, and instead of Chinese we are going for seafood—I was looking forward to Chinese. The phone rings again and my son-in-law wants to see if we will be home around eight o'clock or so. It turns out they are expecting their first child next April, my third grandchild. Did I mention another little change? My son, after a two-year leave, is moving back home. Does it seem like big and little changes in our lives are happening so fast we have little time to adjust?



In thinking about the topic of change, it dawns on me that for years management gurus emphasize what we, as managers, should do to manage change, but they say almost nothing about what I believe is a manager's primary challenge—***the responsibility of leading change***.

There are all kinds of management tools to help us manage change—total quality management, reengineering, right sizing, restructuring, cultural change processes and more. These routinely fall short when they stand alone because they all fail to alter behavior and ***changing behavior is a job for leadership!***

Leadership, in part, is a set of processes that creates organizations in the first place and adapts them to significantly changing circumstances. When circumstances warrant change, the responsibility of leading change challenges a manager to define the ***change vision, align*** people with that change vision, and ***inspire*** them to make the change vision happen despite the obstacles.

The ***change vision*** is a sensible and appealing picture of the future with some implicit or explicit commentary on why people should strive to create that future. A good vision serves three purposes. First, it clarifies the general direction for change. Second, it motivates people to take action in the right direction. Third, it helps coordinate the actions of different people.

In addition to creating a change vision, the responsibility of leading change challenges a manager to ***align*** and ***inspire*** people to realize the vision. Aligning and inspiring people to the change vision can take several forms but a straightforward means is to walk the talk, or lead by example. Often the most powerful way to communicate a new direction is through behavior. When the key players in the organization live the change vision, others will usually grasp it best. Seeing leaders act out the vision tends to eliminate a whole set of troublesome questions about credibility and game playing.

The concept behind "leadership by example" is simple. Words are cheap, but action is not. Our natural tendencies tell us to be cautious about the spoken word and to look for credible action. In a similar vein, telling people one thing and then behaving differently is a great way to derail

a change vision. In short, nothing undermines the communication of a change vision more than behavior on the part of key players that seems inconsistent with the vision. Nothing does more to align and inspire people to the change vision than leadership by example.

In our world of accelerated change, be it in our role as a mother or father or that of a public manager, we should do more than manage change—we should ***shoulder the responsibility of leading change.***

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