

## What If You Learned Leadership Wrong?

### Creating Change Is Easier Than Most Make It

Leadership is about creating change. In order to beat the competition, your results tomorrow have to be better than they are today.

But what if most people make creating change – leadership – harder than it has to be? Evidence abounds that people are sabotaging their own efforts at creating different results. Ernst and Young reported that 66% of corporate strategies are never executed. Have the standards for effective leadership fallen so far that a 34% success rate makes you a success?

You can change your results – starting now.

### An Old Formula That Gets Old Results

What happens if what we've learned about leadership is wrong? As we outline in our new book, *Stomp the Elephant in the Office* (Wister and Willows, 2008), too many people use an out-dated approach to creating change – and it costs them, their colleagues and organizations dearly. The traditional approach to change consists of four steps:

- One: Identify the problem.
- Two: Have an expert determine a solution.
- Three: Tell people how to change.
- Four: Try to overcome the resistance created by the first three steps.

There are many variations to the old formula for change, but the results are predictable:

- Revenue is lost.
- People turn themselves off so future change efforts are pointless.
- Confidence in leadership drops.
- Work relationships and job satisfaction plummet.
- Little progress is made.

Why people use this costly approach is shocking. In an effort to change things (outcomes) ineffective bosses try to change people. This "fix-it" mentality reeks of the idea that those a boss is responsible for are somehow flawed.

But people are not flawed – it is the change process that is flawed. People do not resist change; they resist being changed.

### It's Simple: What's Necessary For Change

Countless books have been written about change. But what if all you needed to know about successful change could be condensed into a formula that fits on the back of your business card?

While there are many subtle components, almost all the books on change essentially reveal three conditions that are invariably part of every effective change initiative. Together they constitute a tool that always allows and supports productive change – and it all fits on a business card.

The Three Conditions that Support Change are:

1. Participants in the change process feel good about themselves.
2. The process includes participants' ideas.
3. The process includes participants' motivations.

Bill Riddle is the regional manager for TP Mechanical, an employer of over 300 people based in Cincinnati, Ohio. "Backlog," or secured business in the pipeline, is the lifeline of the company. In May of 2007 that pipe was nearly empty. Lay-offs were often discussed. "We knew we had to change things," said Bill. "And to change results, it meant we had to change our leadership. We embedded the 3 Conditions that Support Change into everything we did."

Outstanding leadership has dual rewards: enhanced lives and greater profitability. For their use of this leadership tool, Bill's organization received both. "You could see the impact on our culture immediately. Even though times were tough, people responded to how we honored and included them. It was all the proof I needed that people want to be great."

It's probably no surprise that TP Mechanical's bottom line changed next. "In eight months we increased the volume in our pipeline by over five times. This provides us with the resources we need to expand and go after new markets," said Bill. And what is their greatest resource? "Our energized workforce that now takes ownership of their results."

### **Using The 3 Conditions That Support Change**

Utilizing these critical conditions for change are easier than one might think. Here's what Bill and the team do:

*To ensure that people feel good about themselves ...* they provide the proper feedback. When people are doing things well, Bill's team provides others with sincere, specific and selective remarks. Instead of "Thanks for the nice job," people hear "Your flawless work allowed us to hit our quality objective and deliver before the deadline." These comments are the elixir for creating a pro-active culture.

*To ensure that the process includes participant's ideas ...* Bill's team asks questions. In most companies plans for execution are made in seclusion, sans the people who are doing the work. At TP Mechanical employees are asked, "What ideas do you have to achieve this in less time?" and "What benchmarks do you want to use to measure your progress?" With such questions the workforce sheds their robotic, minimalist approach, and the company gets thinkers who can adapt and drive projects themselves.

*To ensure that the process includes participant's motivations ...* the TP Mechanical team taps into what's important to those they lead. In the average company, the ivory tower boss assumes the reason people want to do a good job is to make more money. This same person is then confused when he is hobbled by salary and monetary disputes. Conversely, the TP Mechanical leaders ask, "What drives you?" and "Why is delivering excellence important to you?" This takes people two steps beyond engagement, and one step beyond buy-in ... to an ownership mentality that can't be beat.

Using the 3 Conditions that Support Change, Bill proves that the most critical change necessary is the *change in how we lead*. Instead of trying to change other people, Bill changed himself first, the process second, and the results followed.

Are you making leadership more difficult than it needs to be? What will you change today?

### **About the Author**

Stomp the Elephant in the Office employs the programs and concepts successfully implemented by Pathways to Leadership, Inc., formed by Steven Vannoy and Craig Ross. To find out how big the elephant in YOUR office is, visit [Stomp the Elephant](#)

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