

## ***Leading Teams through Change***

In PwC's 2015 CEO Survey, a key takeaway reveals that one management mantra has become a reality: Change is now truly a constant process, not an event. Back in 2009, Jim Collins warned in "How the Mighty Fall" that the greatest risk to companies was not complacency, but overreach; frenetic, undisciplined change that goes beyond what leaders can manage effectively.

As Elizabeth Doty, a network fellow of Harvard University's Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics and founder of Leadership Momentum, posted in a recent strategy + business blog, the trouble is, our approach to change has itself not really changed over time: Our instinct is still to take an event-driven process and try to execute it more and more quickly. We tend to drive change initiative by initiative, and lose track of the confusion this can create for teams doing the work.

But people generally want to commit and deliver. When they get stuck in hesitation or churn, it is usually because (a) the changes asked of them do not make sense, (b) they are not convinced of the opportunity to improve, or (c) they do not feel they are valued. It's up to the leader to avoid these common pitfalls by making change part of normal, everyday life.

Doty suggests the following strategies to help keep everyone engaged and focused as the mission evolves.

**Weave changes into a narrative.** Connect the dots between past initiatives and what is under way now, to help your team make sense of the bigger picture and where they fit. Be frank about changes of direction and how your thinking is evolving over time.

**Frame the challenge.** People are most committed when they are most needed. Rather than laying out a fully baked vision, sketch a rough outline of the future you see and then invite the team to step up to the challenges in getting there.

**Tell the team's story.** Asking a team to share their journey shows respect for their contributions and allows you to build on any projects or insights under way. Sharing individual stories helps build trust and relationships, and reveals talents.

**Stay on top of the basics.** Don't leave employees in limbo about their roles just because everything is changing. From day one, everyone should understand where to focus "for now."

**Design convincing experiences.** Teams move into action when they are convinced an opportunity is real. Involve employees in firsthand activities, such as customer visits, to help them see how a change is a no-brainer.

**Welcome questions.** We often view questions as resistance. But if you want your team to take ownership of a new direction, it needs to make sense to them. Making it safe to ask questions is the fastest way to get there and also helps you gauge your team's understanding.

**Clarify the economics.** Creating a simple model of your key business drivers can help you communicate the logic of multiple changes and target appropriate measures, while building business acumen on your team.

**Update your shared goals.** Once new directions and opportunities make sense, have the team participate in creating or revising their vision, goals, and milestones, so everyone knows how they connect to the mission.

**Realign the work.** Getting concrete about how a change affects the team's day-to-day work moves you out of abstractions into action. It also helps you identify what to stop doing and how you can leverage one another's strengths.

**Update mutual commitments.** To translate insight into action, be specific about what you are asking team members to commit to and what they need from you in order to deliver.

**Sustain a disciplined focus.** Mock up a dashboard of the measures your team will review at regular check-ins. As new initiatives emerge, be ready to negotiate expectations, so you can deliver on your existing vision and goals.

Doty concludes that the payoff of this process is momentum, for your team and your company. Teams with a routine for change can be both flexible and coordinated. As a leader, when you develop a routine for aligning or realigning a team as part of your day-to-day management style, you help people anticipate change and step up to bigger and stronger commitments.