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CHANGE IS HAPPENING

How Will You Speak, Win Buy-In, and Get People Behind You?

By Suzanne Bates

A number of new research studies clearly reveal that today's CEOs have innovation on the brain. Recent findings from the University of Chicago's Graduate School of Business say that after years of focus on cost reduction and efficiencies, today 75% of CEOs say profitable growth is their top priority. And, according to a recent IBM survey, 65% of CEOs plan radical changes at their companies over the next two years. The IBM data is based on in-person interviews with 765 CEOs and business leaders of small, mid-sized, and large companies.

Why innovate now? According to CEO Notes, an online newsletter, 61% of CEOs from the IBM survey say they fear their competitors are making radical changes in their own business models. They feel they must also make changes just to avoid falling behind.*

Innovation requires creativity and a well thought-out execution plan. It also requires excellent communication from the top down. The changing times require leaders to look long and hard at how they will deliver their individual message. They have to articulate a clear vision of where the organization is going as well as why it must go there. Winning buy-in and getting people behind you can sometimes be more challenging than coming up with a strategic plan.

Case Study: The New CEO

A brand new CEO earned the top job after milestone achievements that moved the company forward. Change was essential in a competitive industry where the company had lost market share, and he had already developed a clear idea for the company's new strategic direction.

As he prepared to kick off the radical new tactical plan, he wondered how he could convince everyone in the organization it had to be done. The company was stable, and most employees beyond the top echelon did not perceive the threat that was looming on the horizon.

As we worked with the CEO, he came to realize that in order to win buy-in he had to paint a clear picture of his vision of what the company would look like in the future, and he had to

provide a real, compelling reason to change. Stability was highly valued in this organization so the strategy would require some painful, short term disruptions.

The first part of his presentation painted the CEO's picture of the future and explained why his vision would benefit the company as a whole. The second part outlined the change that would be required, punctuated by stories meant to illustrate and inspire. He had many stories of individuals who had already contributed great new ideas. They had been leaders in the change process. He also talked about the history of those who had brought innovations to the industry. He even told a few stories from his own experience that demonstrated how he learned to handle change. The presentation was an unqualified success.

Paint a picture for others to help them see what you see, and you are well on the road to winning buy in. People want to be part of something successful. They yearn to contribute to the solution. They want to give their talents to the effort. When you communicate effectively, your employees feel good because they know they own a piece of the company's success.

What if the change is radical? Remember the most important word in persuasive communication is "why." Why does the company need to change? If there is a big enough reason and that reason touches your employees in an important way, you can win hearts and minds. The job of the leader is to find the why and articulate it clearly to all.

Adapt both the message and the style to the target audience. Convey the benefit to those you hope to persuade. In *The Art of Selling Your Ideas*, a Special Report published by the National Institute of Business Management, you'll find this advice: No linchpin, no sale. "Your idea's central benefit to the listener is the linchpin of your sales effort. If this point gets lost, no idea will win approval---no matter how strategically it is packaged or presented."

Bates Communications uses a process called "180 thinking" to help our clients clarify the "linchpin." 180 thinking is simple: you sit in their seats, think as they think, ask the questions they would ask. Once you are asking the right questions, you can answer them. This makes for a persuasive presentation that is audience focused and on target.

Even if the reasons are obvious to you, they may not be clear to your audience. If you have lived with an issue and worked on the solution for a long time you may assume others know or understand what you do. Take the time to do your homework. Say what is obvious to you in a way that is relevant to them. In times of change, taking these steps to communicate effectively is more important than ever.

*Source CEO Notes newsletter

http://clicks.aweber.com/z/ct/?izjUgijy_xi5.fNmm3XbZnw01928