**3 Ways Leaders Cultivate Stability During Change**

 After coaching hundreds of senior leaders through change, I have learned of three critical areas a leader needs to address to prepare the organization, key leaders, and the leader himself/herself for significant transitions.  Missing one of these key operational change components can create a landslide of unwanted and avoidable destructive behaviors from key personnel.  Conversely, planning for these key components enables an organization to stabilize its landscape, creating a stronger transition for all involved.

1. Knowledge Transfer

Do you know what you know? Seriously. Think about this. One of the keys in creating stability during change is getting key information out of your head and using it to empower others. What are the stories behind your business' financials? Why did you make the strategic choices that you did? And, most importantly, are you still clear on the mission of your business, and can you articulate it?

*"It falls on leaders to continually keep perspective on the strategic mission and remind the team that they are part of the greater team and the strategic mission is paramount." -Jocko Willink and Leif Babin, Extreme Ownership, pg 103.*

Simon Sinek exhorts leaders in this video that people don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it. So in developing the next generation, strategizing business plans, and equipping your successor... how are you creating opportunities for them to latch on to the "why" and not just the "what" or the "how"? What your business does tomorrow will change. Why your business exists tomorrow will not. What are you giving the next generation that has to be caught and not taught?  Spoiler alert: this is not something to be left until you are on your way out the door. According to the  Harvard Business Review,

"CEO succession is an ongoing process designed to develop the talent pipeline - not an isolated event. Companies should develop a dual focus that includes both preparing capable near-and mid-term leaders and identifying those deeper down in the organization who possess future leadership potential... Become intimately familiar with the bench and their potential. There should be 7 potential CEOs in your company across several generations. Do you know who they are?"

I am reminded of a client who hired me for one purpose.  When asked what he wanted to happen in our coaching engagement he said, "Help me get everything out of my head." He was aware that he wanted to sell the business within five to ten years. And while that information was in his head, that goal was not possible. Five years later, he has accomplished his goal of organizational alignment to the mission and a solid knowledge transfer to key leaders.  He has doubled his revenue and is about to do it again, and he has a key leader positioned to run vital operations should he be incapacitated for some reason.  How did this happen?  He focused on connecting his team to the why of the business and their contribution to fulfilling the why.  As he did so, each employee's sense of purpose grew, leading to increased ownership and engagement.  This then created a higher acceptance and even demand for even more knowledge transfer from the CEO.

Q: How clear are you on the knowledge that needs to be given to others in order for the organization to be successful in your absence? What is your plan for conveying that knowledge?

2. Unveiling of Transition

The weight and importance you put on communication helps determine the weight with which people will receive it. Whether you are revealing business development or succession planning, honor the work you have put into your business by communicating with restraint and intention. Do you want this to be dramatic and gossipy? Tell everyone about the transition and send a tweet. Do you want this transition to build strength for your successor? Better be intentional about that. Don't send something by email and expect people to know not to talk to others about it.

Consider common and well-understood but often overlooked key communication strategies:
a. Inform the board of top talent development
b. Communicate clear and supportive expectations to those in development,
c. Once transition is set in motion, be sure to monitor the pyramid effect of those most impacted to those least impacted in your communication plan.

Prior planning reduces instability during any change management initiative. And in the case of succession planning, you can't afford not to. Inc Magazine reminds us again to be proactive rather than reactive. One way to guard against an avalanche of unwanted activities and behaviors from your team is to be patient with the change process:

*"Include communication strategists at the very beginning of the discussions about the change, on the strategic team from the start. Too often, qualified communicators are involved after backlash is in full force, when the leaks and rumor mills are rampant.... "*

*"Many leaders and managers underestimate the length of time required for a change cycle. That's why numerous reports indicate poor performance following many IPOs, mergers, change initiatives, etc. Just as Rome wasn't built in a day, neither do people and organizations change in a week, or even a year. Think of it as changing some very ingrained habits; that's what you're doing."*
It takes humility for a leader to remember that communicating change isn't just about an end for you; it's about the future for everyone else. When planning your transition strategy, consider what others need to hear, rather than just stopping at what you need to communicate. Consider a strategic narrative, as described in this recent Forbes article:

*"Rather than presenting a series of bullet points and clip art in a PowerPoint deck, a powerful strategic narrative paints a picture of how a company's past, present, and future fit together in a broader strategy context."*
Q: Who needs to know about what in your business, and by when? What are you intentionally - and unintentionally - communicating with information rollout?

3. Release

How you finish one season is how you will start the next. Allowing reluctance to determine the cadence and vigor with which you hand off the baton doesn't make your sprint look any better. In fact, it makes the whole team look bad. In other words, holding onto something isn't only holding back your successor; it's holding you back from what's next.

I have a client who recently handed over his business to a successor, and it was one of the smoothest transitions I'd ever seen. When asked about it, my client openly discussed the intention with which he did this:
• Identified someone who could lead the organization "one day".
• Developed that person over a few years, communicating to both the board and the successor that this was his intention.
• Slowly started to handover purposeful influence to his successor while still engaged.

What impacted me most though, was hearing that in the last year of training and right after the announcement went public, my client asked his successor "If you could make any changes to this organization right now, what would you do? Because I want to spend my last few months in office using all of the influence I have left to build support for your priorities." What a humble, generationally-minded way to spend the last few months in office!

It comes as no surprise, though, that in the first year of his absence, the organization soared. Board members noted that the company culture was the best in years and the level of vision ownership from the top down was unprecedented.

As you plan, dream, and possibly even grieve through organizational changes, keep the big picture and end goal in mind. If you want your influence to build your next generation of leaders, why not plan for that? We budget money - why don't we budget influence and energy?

Q: How are you budgeting your influence? In what ways could you set up your successor to win even bigger than you did?



**About Cheryl Scanlan**

 Cheryl Scanlan, MCC, CMCC, BCC is president of C3Advantage. She has worked with CEOs that are in Fortune 100 through next generation small business owners. Having also run a multi-million dollar firm in New York, Cheryl knows the importance of business goals and the impact of teams. Cheryl's thought partnering method helps leaders see clearly what is fuzzy, articulate what is currently unintelligible, and generate coherent and executable strategy.

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