

Leading Change: Fostering Creativity and Innovation for an Inspired Workforce

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"Your company has to change if you want to stay competitive!" Economic turmoil and the information age have forced this reality upon us. But if you're the founder of the company, the need for corporate change can be painfully personal. Our businesses are extensions of ourselves. So if change is to succeed, it must start with us.

Unfortunately, the statistics are not encouraging. Over two-thirds of Total Quality Management initiatives have fallen short of their goals. And most articles on reengineering place its failure rate at around seventy percent. There must be a better way.

In his book, *The Dance of Change*, Peter Senge says, "[W]e need to think less like managers and more like biologists." Senge suggests that we view our companies as living organisms that follow a life cycle—from seedlings subject to nurturing and limiting factors in the environment, through periods of growth, to full maturity where we actually face the greatest threat to our prosperity.

As we and our companies mature, we become more conservative. We get comfortable with how we've done things in the past. We resist new ideas that seem risky. And we put on blinders to warning signs that could challenge how we do business. Instead, we should look for ways to reenergize our business before past success becomes future liability.

An internal, biological need for change makes sense. And the idea of renewing our entrepreneurial spirit can be appealing. But when our livelihood is threatened by forced change, we resist it powerfully. In fact, if we review Maslow's hierarchy of needs (see graphic), we see that threats to our comfort and security can reduce us to a primitive mentality. Our "fight or flight" instincts kick in and we draw lines in the sand to defend what is ours.



When the economy is volatile, it's easy to be a yo-yo—up or down as the market fluctuates. But this is just the time to rise above the fray and review the purpose of business itself, the resulting obligation of leadership and how that obligation informs our approach to leading change.

We go into business because we have valuable products or services for which people will pay, thus allowing us to support our families and those we employ. According to David E. Collins, former CEO of Schering-Plough Consumer Products, this creation of wealth is the unique obligation of business in society. No other sector fulfills this role. But why is this important to leading change?

If we return to Maslow, we see that the top levels of self-esteem and self-actualization (finding our perfect work) can be achieved only when our basic needs are met. If, through cutbacks and layoffs, we reduce our employees to psychological cavemen, what can we expect of them but resistance, anger and cynicism? When we most need their enthusiasm to bolster the company's sagging profits, we turn them against us with reengineering tactics that address only the company's bottom line. So what is the answer when our shareholders demand a financial solution?

In her best-selling work, *Leadership and the New Science*, Margaret Wheatley says, "We need to look internally, to see one another as the critical resources. We need to learn how to engage the creativity that exists everywhere in our organizations."

Ned Herrmann, former Manager of Management Education at General Electric, concurs. "If your competition has the same product and the same market, the creativity of your people is your greatest competitive advantage," Herrmann states. Therefore, establishing a corporate culture that fosters creativity and innovation, self-esteem and Maslow's concept of self-actualization becomes a primary obligation of leadership. The tool of choice for many companies--including IBM, Bank of America, Nortel and DuPont—is Whole Brain Technology.

In the 1970s, Ned Herrmann developed the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI™), an assessment tool that measures thinking and learning style preferences. Based on the brain's physiology, this whole brain model identifies four modes or quadrants:

- A (logical, analytical and quantitative)
- B (sequential, organized and detailed)
- C (interpersonal, kinesthetic and emotion-based)
- D (entrepreneurial, visual and synthesizing)

Everyone uses all four modes, but we each have at least one preference. In our preferred mode(s), work is easier and thoughts flow freely. We tend to be less comfortable in non-preferred modes and will even avoid them. And we may feel agitated or even irritated by people who think in the styles we avoid.

Herrmann says that groups of 100 or more individuals represent all four quadrants and comprise a "whole brain" as identified by the HBDI™ profile. The key to unleashing a company's creativity is to help employees identify their preferences, show them how to appreciate less-preferred modes and align their work with their preferences. We then establish whole-brain "reenergizing" teams (with members from each quadrant) in an environment that respects differences and facilitates employees drawing on each other's strengths.

While it is human nature for groups with similar preferences to congregate in homogeneous teams, departments or "silos," effective creative problem solving is more likely to occur when heterogeneous groups tackle a challenge together. Statistically, even split-second decisions made in an airline cockpit are more accurate when multiple members of the flight team are involved in the decision.

So, what does a whole-brain approach to change mean to your role as leader?

First of all, knowing that you have powerful creative resources available in your employees relieves you of the false belief that the leader must have all the answers. (Peter Senge calls this the Myth of the Hero CEO.)

Second, if you understand creating an atmosphere in which creativity can occur as a prime obligation of leadership, you will be less reactionary to changes in the economic landscape and more reticent to lay off valuable workers simply to achieve short-term financial relief.

Third (and potentially most satisfying to you as an entrepreneur), whole brain technology clarifies your role as visionary, communicator and facilitator of the creative process.

With that understanding, here is a quick formula that can help you create a collaborative environment:

L = listen to your employees (builds trust and reveals important facts for decision making)

E = set an ethical example in your behavior (walk your talk)

A = be accepting of people's differences and their ability to make decisions about their work (openness starts with you)

D = powerfully describe the company's mission and vision so that all members of the organization share the same goals (tell the truth and tell it often)

With these guidelines, you can create an open organization where your staff feel free to innovate. They will reward your trust with increased productivity and passion for their work. And they will meet the challenge of economic difficulties because your business practices foster their personal development. In fact, once you unleash your company's creativity, change becomes a dynamic way of life for the entire organization. Even you!

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