

Excellence by design

Re-conceptualizing performance success

Two years ago, a local manufacturing company realized that its organizational structure was negatively impacting performance.

Decisions took forever, requiring trips up and back down the authority ladder. Collaboration happened only by accident, since it was not an everyday practice. Differences of opinion were taken personally rather than being viewed as part of the process for exploring new and better ways of doing business.

Customers were satisfied, but rarely appeared to be gung ho about the company.

Then a change in leadership occurred when retirement allowed a new leader to emerge. With the new leader came a new vision. His plan was leading edge, filled with potential, compelling, and simultaneously scary. It required a new organizational structure, one that eliminated the traditional pre-packaged hierarchy in favor of horizontal cross-functional collaboration (bye, bye silos).

Some team members immediately jumped on board while others waited on the sidelines. One year later, those who wouldn't volunteer to "play" were invited to leave.

This new vision and plan prompted a fundamental shift that resonated to the business's core. A new culture emerged around core values. Personal transformation stories could be found throughout the organization. The leader's unflinching resiliency, steadfast determination, caring communication and devout candor made this successful conversion effort possible.

Here are five must do's from his playbook:

Enlist commitment to the vision

People need to know what's going to

happen. It's even more important that they understand why it's going to happen. Of greatest importance is the need to understand what consequences will unfold if nothing happens.

Everyone wants to be on the winning team but not everyone is able or willing to relearn new ways of being or doing in order to cross that bridge. Wanting and actually doing are vastly different. One's a dream and the other requires transformation.

A compelling vision is the anchor that drives focused energy and effort. Invite team members to contribute and discuss how to make it become a living, sustainable message.

Model the way

In Lee Thayer's book, *Leadership – Thinking, Doing, Being*, he states, "If you want to know what people mean by what they say, watch what they do." This is especially true for the leader. Thayer goes on to say, "How people behave is your mandate."

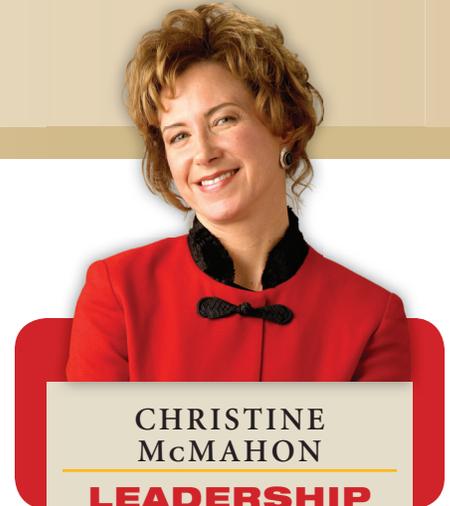
Organizations rarely perform better than their leader. Who you are and how you engage really matters.

Own your truth

Growth requires some degree of personal transformation. It's inevitable that at some point everyone has developmental opportunities. As a leader, how you own and process through roadblocks is contagious.

Sometimes the timing or magnitude of the challenge is overwhelming. Rather than succumb to the resistance, ask yourself:

1. What within me is resisting this change?
2. What meaning do I associate with this change?
3. What does this change repre-



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sent to me?

4. What happens if I do nothing?
5. What happens if I initiate and support this corrective action?
6. What one single step can I take right now to begin to tame this challenge?
7. Who can I enlist to help support my success?

High performance is about how you leverage human capital to advance the organization's success. Is there someone on your team who already excels in this area? What support or advice could they offer to support your success? What message would it send to the organization to know that you are receiving support from another team member?

Leverage team resources as appropriate.

Initiate feedback

Sub-par performance promotes a culture of mediocrity when ignored. By default, tolerance of low performance sends the message that, "accountability is something we talk about at this company but don't always adhere to." This mixed message undermines cultural integrity. Everyone needs to be held to the same standard, including the leader.

This requires enormous courage for a leader. To sit in the hot seat while your team delivers feedback about what you do well and what you could improve upon requires a deep level of personal commitment and emotional resiliency. The natural response is to be defensive and push back. However, this will prove counterproductive to the process. Rather, stay

present and demonstrate grace under fire. Become the living example of your commitment to receive feedback.

Take time after the experience to process how you plan to address the issues – how you own your developmental areas and how your commitment to change becomes the demonstrated standard that your team will model.

Demonstrate courage – be accountable

The newly implemented flat structure promoted real decision-making responsibility and accountability – it did not allow buck-passing to the next level up or over the silo wall. This required a shift from being accountable to a leader to becoming accountable to each other – no exceptions.

The leader communicated the importance of owning mistakes, not as a failure, but as a tool for self-development and further growth. This gave them the neces-

sary permission to be candid about their competencies without fearing recrimination or hostile embarrassment.

Through the leader's actions he demonstrated that self-correction is the desired outcome of a missed attempt. In doing so, he gave his team permission to be honest without fearing recrimination or hostile embarrassment.

Performance is a direct result of what a leader tolerates ... or not. Accountability ensures that people invest their effort and energy behind stated expectations and feedback insures that they focus on the right initiatives by knowing what to say "yes" or "no" to.

Your team's attitude and how they respond to situations are a direct result of who you are and what you define as acceptable. ■

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