
Steps To Transform Your Organization

"We can't wait for the storm to blow over. We've got to learn to work in the rain." -- Pete Silas, Phillips Petroleum

The winds of change are blowing hard in the world. From government regulations, market pressures, new technologies, workforce attitudes, shifting customer priorities, to global competition, its hard to dodge all those rain drops.



So what to do? Time to transform. The old days when you could just put a plan together for incremental improvements year over year are long gone. As fast as things are changing, can you afford that approach? Speed saves. Tomorrow's winners will be those organizations that are the first to adopt and adapt to change, and the first to execute transformation strategies in their business. What's more, those that do so first practically guarantee themselves a sustainable advantage over their competitors.

Here are eight steps that you can implement that will put you in the lead to stay:

1. Establish a sense of urgency

- You must be able to communicate why transformation is needed. Many organizations that I have worked with over the years are, or have been, leaders in their industry. If your company is like one of those fortunate enterprises, you've been successful so far. The question is, does past success guarantee future success? What are today's and tomorrow's market and competitive realities. What crises, or potential crises are looming? What major opportunities are out there for the taking?



2. Form a powerful guiding coalition

- Begin by assembling a group with enough power to lead the effort. You must have your best minds and hearts on this change leadership team. The test for whether you have chosen the best is if their bosses scream bloody murder! Keep in mind that this team shouldn't be just the current senior managers. Look for true leaders, both formal and informal. True leaders are the folks that people trust and look to for guidance. These leaders reside at every level of your organization. Train this group in team skills and dynamics, provide a structure for them to operate in, give them the time and authority to make decisions, then watch magic happen!

3. Create an inspiring Vision

- As a leader, one of your most important responsibilities is the creation and communication of a vision that energizes people to higher levels of performance. Nothing inspires more than a shared vision of the future. It is a beacon that lights the way for sustainable achievement. It enables both leaders and followers to focus their energies and talents. Paint a compelling picture that inspires, then get out of the way!

4. Communicate the Vision

- As individuals, we each have preferred styles of learning and communication. Some people communicate most effectively through pictures and diagrams, others through touch or tactile experiences, and others by hearing the spoken word. There is a whole science behind this reality called Neuro-Linguistic Programming. Without delving into the details, recognizing that different people learn and communicate differently, you should include all types and forms in your communication strategy. Use every possible vehicle to communicate the new vision and how they will get there. One of the most powerful form of communicating the vision is through the behaviors of the guiding coalition.

5. Empower others to act on the Vision

- Get rid of obstacles to change. There can be no sacred organizational, procedural, or policy cows. Anything that undermines the new vision must be changed or eliminated completely. This can be a tough requirement to meet, especially if you were the one who put those sacred cows in place. Encourage non-traditional thinking, ideas, activities, and actions.



6. Plan and create short-term wins

- Break the transition down into manageable steps. Make the changes that the vision inspires organization wide in a small area of the operation. This gives everyone a chance to see the benefits on a small scale. It also gives you the opportunity to experiment without jeopardizing the entire operation if a detail is unintentionally overlooked. A “lessons learned” approach pays rich dividends and provides a great opportunity to celebrate the team’s accomplishment. Recognize and reward employees involved in the improvements.

7. Consolidate improvements and produce still more change

- Using increased credibility gained from step 6, change systems, structures, and policies that don’t fit the new vision. Incorporate the vision into hiring, promoting, and employee development decisions and practices. Hire, promote, develop people who have the attitudes necessary to realize the vision. Continuously reinvigorate the process with new projects, themes, and change agents. Your goal during this step is to build “critical mass”, having more and more people involved and engaged in change. Once you achieve critical mass, momentum becomes self-sustaining and change accelerates. Hang on... what a great ride!

8. Institutionalize the new approach

- Articulating the connections between the new behaviors and organizational success begins to build the sustainability of the transformation. Physical, policy, procedure, and process changes help ensure that habits and practices of the past stay in the past. People will tend to revert to old ways of doing things if given even half a chance. It’s not that they mean any harm, it is a function of the power of ‘habits of thought’... a powerful sub-conscious reflex. Continuous communication and education is critical for sustainable results. Develop the means to ensure leadership development and succession with the attitudes necessary for continuous improvement.

