Tactical Management:
Getting Employees on Board

By Richard A. Reda and Jean B. Lenderking

Taking a deeper look at the next step in making decisions that address immediate needs while keeping a longer term goal in focus.

In the military, every leader learns from day one that his or her primary responsibility is the accomplishment of the mission and the welfare of the troops. Both aspects have equal weight and importance. There is no comma in that statement, and it's not an "and/or" situation.

Many organizations include in their value statements that employees are their most important resource. Unfortunately, often times that's as far as that sentiment goes. In developing a tactical strategy to move your organization forward, an element that is as critical as the task oriented goals and objectives is the one of communication.

In the previous article (*Tactical Management: Getting the Most from Managers*) we discussed the importance of relationship building. Communicating effectively with your employees is the practical application of that skill.

Well Balanced Strategic Plans Include a Communications Strategy

A well balanced strategic plan must include a communications strategy. There must be goals and objectives, milestones, accountable individuals and feedback mechanisms. In an organization that is going through significant change, it also is advisable to include a "rumor control" function, such as a hot line or a

web site with frequently asked questions, or, as often as possible, regularly scheduled briefings.

By publishing and circulating the strategic plan,—which includes an extensive communications strategy—you've taken a huge step in stemming rumors and lowering anxiety in the work force. If possible or practical, seek input from employees on options for enhancing communications, as well as with identifying and developing strategies for changing the organization.
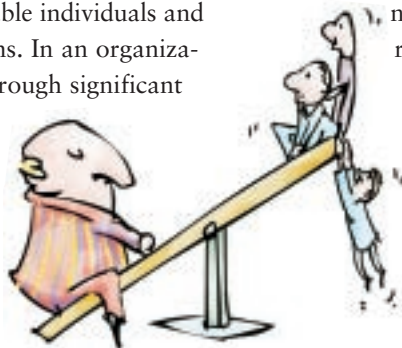
Make Employees Part of the Solution: Begin by Assessing the Workforce

If employees are part of the solution, the changes are likely to be more easily effected than if they are just thrust upon those who are responsible for implementation.

One aspect of a tactical communications strategy is to begin with an assessment of the workforce. Set the framework of this assessment by defining the present state and the future state of the organization. Determine whether or not employees understand the need for the changes, not just what the end result is expected to be.

Jumping ahead to merely discussing the future state, and how wonderful everything is going to be, assumes that everyone has the

same understanding that you do of what the driving forces are, and what the ramifications of not changing could be.

In doing this kind of assessment, you also will have a better idea of where you need to enhance your communications efforts and where potential problem areas are likely to pop up.

Next Assess Your Customers and Clients

The next step is to do a similar assessment with your customers and clients. They need to understand where you're going and why, just as much as your employees, especially if they will have delivery of their services disrupted, or modified, or if new expectations for them are a possible outcome (such as the self service gas station example).

> **"Each normally wants the organization to succeed; each wants to take pride in their organization; each wants to do the best job possible; and each wants to have a sense of security in the organization and in their job."**

How does this relate to getting employees on board? Your employees are often the direct representatives of your organization with your customers. If the employees don't understand where the organization is going and why, their aversion to any changes can undermine the confidence of your customers in your vision and direction.

It also can put your customers in the position of demanding that you don't make any such changes, even if the end result would mean worse service or none at all. Additionally, if your customers don't understand where you're going, and why, their doubts and misgivings will only fuel the concerns and apprehension of your employees.

Share the "Big Picture" With Employees

In many instances, rank and file employees don't have a clear picture of the needs of the larger organization or where they fit in. Their view is limited to their own back yard: their own team or unit and their specific responsibilities.

Interaction with other elements of the organization in discussions about the changes in the organization, and the reasons for those changes can provide them with an opportunity to widen their horizons and enhance their effectiveness. It is also an opportunity for interest based problem solving.

In spite of organizational stovepiping, most employees have the same or similar interests as their peers, and as their management. Each normally wants the organization to succeed; each wants to take pride in their organization; each wants to do the best job possible; and each wants to have a sense of security in the organization and in their job.

Create a Collaborative Process

Include in your communications strategy an opportunity for the different elements of the organization to discuss their interests and to collaborate on ways to help effect the changes that the organization will be going through. By discovering common interests individuals can be guided through a collaborative process to look for solutions that work for all, or at least for a greater number.

In looking at the big picture, your immediate reaction may be that you can't have every employee participate in designing and implementing the organization's changes. That's not what we're suggesting. There are, however, several opportunities along the way to obtain employee input on how to effect some of those changes, and to even improve them.

Sometimes, just having the chance to make that kind of contribution, even if never acted upon, is enough to change an employee from being an obstacle to being a facilitator. Ultimately, management provides the leadership to enhance teamwork that produces results. ✈

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