Six Critical Skills with which You Need to Be Really Comfortable

By Timothy F. Bednarz, Ph.D

The complexion of business and the workplace are continually changing. The skills required of leaders in the past have become outdated and outmoded by the volatile business environment. Today's leaders are required to change and adapt or lose their professional edge. There are a number of critical skills that need to be mastered in order for leaders to remain a relevant and viable resource for their company.

Most leaders would like to maintain the status quo. It is easy to be resistant to change. In fact, many are doing just that, hoping that conditions will revert to the way they were in the past. Unfortunately, this wishful and myopic thinking produces numerous adverse consequences.

The dynamic impact of change is a reality that each leader must fully comprehend and come to terms with. This demands that thinking and attitudes continually evolve with increasing ongoing transformations in the global marketplace. New skills are required for leaders to integrate these changes into their business environment and adapt to new ones not far behind.

A number of skills must be developed in order to enhance personal and professional development. None of these skills are independent of a leader's job performance, but are in fact strongly linked to it. These include the ability to:

Think 'Outside the Box'

Most leaders' personal thinking is shaped by the events and circumstances they have previously experienced. Over time, thinking patterns tend to become solely focused on the activities of the company and upon issues and situations related to the effectiveness of their employees. Because of this, reasoning and perceptions often become clouded and stagnant. Many times they include a bias and perspective that does not reflect reality.

Change and its forces really do demand that leaders get outside of their normal way of viewing things to develop a fresh perspective of both their company and the reality of the existing business environment. This often results in a thinking paradigm shift that positively impacts future business practices and methods. It compels leaders to recognize the changing reality of their own business climate, its needs and concerns, and how emerging forces are producing a positive or negative impact on how the business functions. It also works to develop a fresh focus on what is needed to compete effectively, grow and gain market share.

Change the Culture

Linked with this thinking paradigm shift is a need for effecting a change in the corporate culture. This is necessitated by the various factors brought about by a continuously evolving marketplace. Leaders often have difficulty dealing with the concept of changing the culture around them. This stems mostly from fear of the personal consequences that accompany corporate transformation and because most of the changes tend to challenge conventional wisdom.

Most leaders don't understand exactly what is required to evolve as truly effective leaders or how to go about it. New methods and ideas conflict with their current managerial roles. They feel at risk because their comfort zones are threatened and new skills in leadership are often lacking. Many worry they will not be able to fill their newer role adequately enough to produce the results the culture change demands.

Monitoring the Pulse of the Business

A leader's professional development demands that they delegate more daily activities and responsibilities to selected employees. While this pushes decision making down to the front lines—where it has the most impact—it does not mean that leaders should not be continually aware of what is happening in regard to each delegated employee. Rather, they should use some form of metrics system to keep a daily pulse on what is occurring in the workplace. Though they need to delegate their micromanagement activities, there still is the essential need to maintain an active and open presence with their employees or work teams. This allows them to individually and proactively interact whenever required.

Act Quickly

As leaders formulate their particular leadership style, they must incorporate the ability to act quickly and decisively. In a business environment of rapid change, hesitancy is a liability, especially in the current workplace environment where failure to act can easily create an opportunity for the competition to gain a foothold.

Keep it Simple

While many leaders are prone to the misconception that the more sophisticated and complicated the plan, the better it is; a good leader understands the need to keep things simple and to stress execution.

Though outwardly impressive, complicated plans and solutions demand complex and costly systems to support them, are prone to human error, and increase the risk of failure. Straightforward and simple plans and goals are less expensive, less subject to human error and far easier to execute.

Develop Self-Confidence

Leaders who desire to develop their professional skills must cultivate an innate sense of confidence in their decisions. Many stumble into the pitfall of always second-guessing themselves. This results in hesitancy and a loss of self-confidence in their professional abilities. It is a far more desirable leadership trait to act quickly and decisively, then modify the decision as additional data and results become available, than it is to wait until extenuating circumstances develop due to indecision. Inaction only gives rise to additional problems that will also need to be addressed and surmounted.

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