

THE CHANGE CHALLENGE.....A Newsletter About Leadership

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Welcome to the August 2013 issue of *The Change Challenge*. Some executives see their organization as a machine and people as gears that make it run. They implement procedures to maintain control and are surprised when their people respond by waiting to be told what to do. That's the subject of this month's feature article titled **"People Aren't Machines."**

The *Leading Change* article titled **"Their Stories Define Your Culture"** asserts that your organization's culture isn't in its office décor, its org chart, or the minds of its leaders - it's in the stories that its people tell about heroes, goats, and behaviors. The *Personal Change* article titled **"Electronic Conversations"** claims that leadership conversations are more important today because we exchange information with more people, more often, in more media than ever before.

As always, your feedback and recommendations to improve this newsletter would be appreciated via return email or through *The Change Blog* at www.dickstieglitz.com.

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This Month's Articles

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Feature Article

PEOPLE AREN'T MACHINES

"People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But People will never forget how you made them feel. - Maya Angelou

Justin, a group manager in a government technology firm, assigned writing tasks for a must-win proposal to key members of his billable staff and committed to do competitive research himself. He gave each person instructions on what he expected and provided a detailed schedule for preparing the proposal. At the first review, Justin was disappointed by the mediocre progress - strategy questions were impeding progress in several areas. He responded to the questions as best he could, but acknowledged that he hadn't started his research because he *"had high priority customer work."* The team felt like the extra hours they invested in the proposal were not appreciated and their pleas for help were falling on deaf ears.

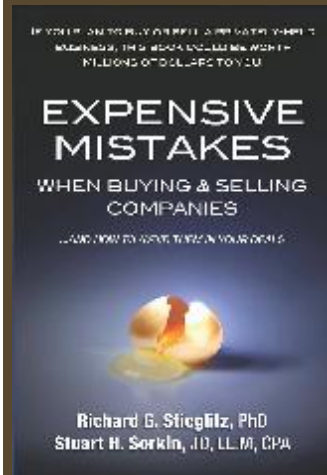
Laser-like Precision. Some executives see their organization as a machine and people as the gears that make it run. With laser-like precision they tell people what to do, how to do it, and when it must be done while missing feedback about how the objectives might be accomplished more quickly and easily. Such executives implement procedures to maintain control and are surprised when their people respond by waiting to be told what to do. In contrast, effective leaders understand that their organization is a collage of individual expectations connected by the promise of shared success. They reach out to build relationships and have conversations that motivate and inspire as well as direct.

High Price of Ignoring Ideas. One reason why coaches are brought into organizations is the inability of executives to treat peers, direct reports, customers, and other stakeholders with respect - to value who they are as well as what they can contribute. At one time or another, most of us have worked for a boss who discounted or ignored our ideas. Like me, you may recall those positions as the most frustrating and least rewarding segments of your career. By allowing people to voice their ideas - even those that seem off-the-wall at first - you will have conversations that lead to more effective approaches, deepen mutual respect, and increase everyone's commitment to the outcome.

Common Myth. One common myth about being in a leadership position is that everyone will follow you merely because of your title. That belief often plays out when new leaders expect people to adopt new practices. *"Now that I'm the boss, here's how we will do things."* Instead, new leaders would increase their chances for success by holding conversations that align everyone behind a change. *"I'm glad to be here. How do you think we can improve our results? What changes would you like to make?"* A shared vision strengthens relationships and avoids resistance.

People's Expectations. You may have coached a sport, managed a project, and/or led an organization. Those experiences share a key

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Looking to have your organization embrace change?



characteristic: the group's objective was bigger than any one person could accomplish alone. When you were called to lead, people expected you to be an expert - even if you were not. They also expected you to tap their potential and mold them into a winning team. As a leader, the challenge is to get each person to perform at an optimal level in alignment with each other. That challenge requires that you build a relationship with each of them, to talk and listen to them, and to inspire them to do their best.

Comfort Zone. At the start of each new challenge, the goal may have been outside your people's comfort zone. While they are excited about the possibilities, their enthusiasm may be diluted by their concerns. Such mixtures of optimism and fear are a natural part of anything new. Stepping through fear is what separates winners from losers. Empathize with your people as they experience feelings that may be similar to how you felt when you were in their shoes - and ones that you also may be feeling yourself.

Emotional Agility. Emotional agility is the ability to quickly achieve an effective emotional state under stressful circumstances. Just like an athlete preparing for a playoff game, you must mentally prepare to motivate people, address complex issues, and calm tense situations. Your emotional agility - or lack thereof - will greatly affect your performance and your team's performance. The higher your leadership position, the wider the range of emotions you are likely to encounter in a single day - from celebration to condolences, from victory to defeat, from unexpected support to active resistance. You must be able to quickly shift from emotions you feel spontaneously to emotions that connect with people and motivate them to produce superior results in spite of difficult circumstances - like today's tight budgets and demanding competition.

Leading Change

THEIR STORIES DEFINE YOUR CULTURE

Recall your first day in your current organization. What legends did your new colleagues tell you about? Who were the heroes and what were their stories? What behaviors were acceptable and unacceptable? The legends, heroes, stories, and behaviors are the culture of an organization. The culture may not be obvious at first, yet it becomes clear when you listen to the stories that people tell. Their stories reveal traits that are admired and essential for success.

For example, a company set a goal to earn recognition for its government clients. One team pursued that goal vigorously. They identified awards available to government managers and linked their project's results to the award criteria. Two years later, the government's project manager was selected as a Top-100 IT Executive. Members of the project team received a bonus because their client won the award, and they proudly attended the award ceremony to recognize the client's success. No one was surprised when the team won the contract renewal. The team's

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**THAT'S WHAT THIS
BOOK IS ALL ABOUT!**

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organization's culture isn't obvious in its budget, its office decor, or its organization chart - although those appearances provide clues. The culture may not even be what the leaders think it is. Only conversations with its people reveal the real culture behind the public façade. The culture began with the founders' vision, values and beliefs; but it changed based on the leaders and employees who followed. The culture in some organizations is as steady as a rock while in others it morphs virtually overnight in response to change. To create a culture where people can succeed individually and collectively, promote stories about relationships and collaboration as the way that your organization's achieves goals.

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Personal Change

ELECTRONIC CONVERSATIONS

Since we have conversations with more people, more often, in more media than ever before, leadership conversations are more essential than ever before. In today's digital age, conversations are multi-media interactions that occur via emails, blogs, text messages, tweets, video conferencing, Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+, among others, in addition to old-fashioned face-to-face meetings and telephone calls.

Electronic conversations efficiently deliver facts and figures yet they convey little, if any, emotion. They are easily misunderstood and can become grenades that explode in the receiver's in-box. Furthermore, some people's unthinking reaction when they receive a grenade email is to lob one back. *"I can't believe he said that and copied the boss. I'll set the record straight!"* That response initiates an email contest and erects barriers when success requires relationship bridges.

Another adverse trend today is texting a coworker rather than walking down the hall to have a conversation. Unconsciously or consciously, such people avoid the personal interactions that make relationships work. They're often surprised when messages are misinterpreted or people don't align behind a key project. The difficulties arise because they have not built connection and alignment. Without question, electronic communications are useful in opening doors, scheduling appointments, and reaching out to people you cannot meet face-to-face. But they are not a panacea for resolving issues, nor do they replace the synchronous conversations that solve real problems and create real opportunities.

Many executives who work in a virtual environment have limited opportunities for face-to-face conversations. If you are one of them, then phone or Skype provide additional richness in conversations. Those media allow you to hear and see inflections, tonality, pauses, and the pace of the conversation in addition to the words - which enables you to understand the unspoken as well as the spoken messages. Think about that before you initiate your next electronic conversation.

Friends & Colleagues,

If you are concerned about your organization's communications culture, read *Leadership Conversations* and contact me to discuss strategies. If you found this e-letter to be useful, please forward it to a friend. If not, let me know why at dick.stieglitz@MyLeadershipConversations.com.

Until next month,
DICK

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