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Leading Teams through Change

by Kevin Leavey

Over the past year, many managers have been faced with leading a team through some organizational change. Have you?

- If so, do you wonder if there was anything you could have done better?
- If not, are you prepared for the day you could be called upon to act?

A change could be as simple as adding a new employee, or as traumatic as a major reorganization that includes job losses. At either extreme, there are several things you can do to ease the process and put your team in the best position to succeed in the future. This article will provide concrete advice on addressing the issues that will arise when there is a significant change in your team's membership, structure or operational functioning.

THE END

Yes, your journey actually starts at the end. Any time a leader leaves or a new leader is assigned, members leave, teams merge, etc., there is an "ending". At such times, the team will return to what has been referred to as a "Forming"¹ stage. The team needs to re-establish its identity. Team members often are eager and excited with high expectations, but have no idea what to do next. They will be anxious with respect to where they fit and what is expected of them. In any case, your team will depend upon you, their manager, for leadership and direction.

WHAT DO YOU DO?

- Plan what you want to do and how you want to do it.
- Ensure you have all the information you possibly can.
- When speaking with your people, acknowledge the situation you are all in. Disingenuous plati-

tudes will only serve to alienate your team at a critical time in the team's development.

- Recognize and address the emotional aspect of the organization change. If you do not, you run the risk of losing team acceptance of the new direction.
- Demonstrate your commitment to open communication by getting the facts out, using active listening skills and encouraging people to express their feelings.
- Address concerns about the inevitable question; "What is going to happen to me?"
- Define what is over and what will remain the same.
- Treat the past and its people with respect, but don't stay there. It is your job to move the team forward.

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT?

Resistance. When people are forced out of their comfort zones, they push back. The most common source of resistance comes from not knowing what is going on. The fear of the unknown can be very powerful. You pay your people for their brains. It shouldn't be too hard to realize their imaginations can and will run wild to concoct very personal worse-case scenarios. Attack this head on. You must communicate. Give people information, and do it again and again. Say what you know. If you don't know, commit to finding out what you can.

Another source of resistance can occur when an employee is not able to adequately perform their new job from the start. In this case, first you must endeavor to get them the needed training, resources and information. Worry later about addressing a poor person/job fit.

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You pay your people for their brains. It shouldn't be too hard to realize their imaginations can and will run wild to concoct very personal worse-case scenarios.

¹ My source is personal development training I received earlier in my career that was invaluable in assisting me through several organizational changes. The seminar was based upon a four-stage group development model published by Bruce Tuckman in 1965. He referred to the development model as Forming Storming Norming Performing. Ten years later, he added Adjourning to the mix. There is an abundance of references to the model on the Internet for those who wish to learn more.

Your employee may just not want to change. If he or she is not willing, first try to gain his or her buy-in through participation with the group. Later, you can manage his or her performance.

HOW DO YOU MOVE THE TEAM FORWARD?

While your team is “Forming”, it is your job to direct them. You will be most effective by taking responsibility and providing needed structure around goals, roles and procedures:

- Clarify department goals that align with your divisional strategy/goals.
- Clarify roles and resolve any role conflicts and ambiguities.
- Establish group procedures that will support the work of the team.
- Focus the tasks and priorities of the team while also developing good working relationships.

Depending upon the skills and experience of your team, you will most likely make decisions on your own at this stage. To avoid some common traps:


- Be sure to teach and demonstrate skills.

- Do not be dominating or overbearing.
- Encourage your team and try to draw out questions.
- Give people recognition for following directions, meeting defined standards and getting the work done.

This may sound like a lot of work, and it can be. The fruits of your labor will not materialize overnight. It will take time and effort. However, it is time and effort well spent because it returns the team to a high functioning state as quickly as possible. In summary:

- Address the situation.
- Know what you want to do and how you want to do it.
- Communicate.
- Be prepared for resistance.
- Provide the structure necessary to get your team on its feet.

A solid foundation for your team is crucial if you wish to see them become a high performing team in the future. ●



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Visit www.soa.org/cpd to read about how to meet the Requirement's provisions, attest compliance and review the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

Some highlights...

- The SOA CPD Requirement became effective on Jan. 1, 2009.
- Member input has helped to create a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).
- Now is the time to start earning and tracking your credits.
- Most SOA members will easily meet the Requirement with Alternative Compliance provisions.
- Members must report compliance with the SOA CPD Requirement as of Dec. 31, 2010.