

Leading Change

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Change is constant. To stand upright while the ground shifts below them, leaders must narrow their focus on where they want to take the organization and build support from every significant player to get there. At times, leaders must instruct. But for the company to endure long periods of change, leaders must create an environment where their teams drive themselves to reach their goals and be held accountable.

01 DEFINE THE PURPOSE

Before embarking on change, every leader in the organization needs to align on where they want to go and feel motivated to get there. What is your higher-level value proposition? What do you do to make your customers more successful?

“The mission has to go beyond what the quarter and year need to look like. It needs to be, ‘Who do we want to be?’”

- Maryrose Sylvester

Uncover the drive

Spend 60 days trying to learn. Talk less and listen more. Use different formats, such as one-on-one conversations, small groups, and town halls, to ask innocent and provocative questions. Scale your interactions until you have enough points of view to shape your opinion on where the business wants to go.

“What do you do that makes your customers better, that makes them fall in love?”

- Maryrose Sylvester

Seek opportunity

Create a framework detailing what the business excels or fails at. Do a SWOT analysis with a small team and cascade it until you feel like it applies to the company. Run it by teams in diverse areas of the company to confirm your perceptions.

Distil the strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities into a central vision that will guide the company's new direction. Again, start with your own thoughts and those of your trusted advisors, and iterate by sharing the vision with increasingly larger groups of people.

Build advocacy for the vision by involving all teams in its design and critique.

Build momentum

Significant change will receive pushback, especially if it's difficult to achieve. Plan time to build support.

Who could kill your mission? Why would they want to, and how would they do it? Know their point of view and what it would take to change their opinion.

“Sometimes people are afraid to say what they really think, but they're going to cast the vote against you quietly. You need to flush that out.”

- Maryrose Sylvester

Coach your teams until they start speaking about the new direction like it was their idea. Start with a few supporters and build out on a person-by-person level until the advocacy creates its own momentum.

“You're going to need to get people on the bus with you and not run them over with the bus.”

- Maryrose Sylvester

EXERCISES

Color coded

Maryrose used red, yellow, and green cards in her quarterly meetings to create a fun debate around accountability.

Each leader was invited to bring their view of how their team performed against the quarterly goals and share it with the leadership team by assigning a color to the results.

Heroes

Maryrose invited people to submit who they thought the quarterly heroes were. Every quarter, they'd vote to select a winner based on how they exemplified the company's five values.

They would then discuss the action—such as a customer win, a cost reduction, or an environmental improvement—and how it impacted the business.

Get buy-in from the board

Boards seek to avoid risk. They don't want change for the sake of change. When advocating for change, the conversation will be easier if you present an idea to a problem they are already aware of.

Provide pre-reading to prepare board members for the challenge, the solution you propose, and the timeframe you need to execute. Know each of the board member's backgrounds, what they're good at, and how their domain experience supports your plan for change.

02 SUSTAIN ACCOUNTABILITY

A new plan will only work if accountability is consistent and sustained.

Set the milestones

Bring together a small leadership team to define successful change for the business and how it will be measured in the short, medium, and long term. What is each functional organization's role in reaching those goals?

“What gets measured gets done.”

- Maryrose Sylvester

Invite each team to share a story of their achievements at each quarterly meeting. What worked? What do they need to improve? Make review part of your quarterly rhythm.

“Get people to start living, ‘We can do this, and when we do it well, we are recognized and it's appreciated.’”

- Maryrose Sylvester

MEMBER TACTICS

Use budget restrictions to force teams to prioritize and slow down.

- Andrew Filson

Implement a rule that when something is added to the plate, something else must be removed.

- Guillaume Gerardin

Allow time for completion and rest

Your teams need to feel that change is not a short journey. Yes, they've hit milestones along the way, but more are to come. Manage pace and nurture motivation. The overall change you require may be profound, but you must let it play out one step at a time.

When teams have achieved something great, lower the bar to let them reenergize. Rotate people across projects with short and long-term goals to reduce fatigue.

“I had to purposefully figure out how to help the organization breathe.”

- Maryrose Sylvester

Teach people patience and perseverance. Your teams need to see a leader who doesn't compromise excellence but who is patient enough to let things play out over the full duration of the plan. Impatience and reactive behavior from the leader will cascade through the organization.

“They need to see that your ship's not sinking and that you're in complete control, and that they're in complete control of the journey.”

- Maryrose Sylvester

Stability builds motivation and momentum. During change, the number of ideas will exceed your capacity to pursue them. Allow teams to successfully complete projects and celebrate their success before chasing the next big thing.

“What you say no to is more important than what you say yes to.”

- Maryrose Sylvester

Design for constant learning

During periods of change, you are never done learning. Where are the gaps between the company's current and future state? What does the organization need to learn before the new strategy can work?

Encourage teams to discuss how they learn. Even in success, step back to ask if you are doing things the best way possible.

“You learn from each other, you learn from your customers, you learn from your shareholders, you learn from everyone.”

- Maryrose Sylvester

Embrace good failure, not failure when you weren't paying attention, but failure when you tried something hard and it didn't quite work.



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