



Taking the **Lead**

Positioning: Leading Others Through Change

Donna Rawady

An effective leader is well aware of the environment that he or she is creating at any given time, especially in the midst of change. Positioning provides the courtesy of transition before driving immediate and specific outcomes. We may not be able to minimize the challenges that people will experience when change ensues. However, through positioning we may increase the comfort level enough to help employees move towards and through the change with a little less trepidation—minimizing the negative impact to employee morale and productivity.

Small-scale Scenario: You've become the new department manager of an existing and seasoned team. As you become more familiar with the demands and expectations of your role and department, you realize that you're going to need to explore your team's potential for additional capacity in order to delegate and disburse the department's increased workload. You could opt to call each of your team members in separately for a discussion about their current responsibilities and capacity for more work and begin delegating immediately.

If you were to utilize positioning in this situation, you might hold a brief meeting with the entire team a week prior to actually shifting or delegating additional responsibilities. In the meeting, you might:

- Acknowledge the extensive experience within the team and ask for their support.
- Let your team know that over the next couple of weeks, you'll be requesting

one-on-one meetings and ask them to be prepared to help you understand the scope of their current responsibilities in more detail—all in preparation to best utilize their skill-base, knowledge and capacity towards the departmental and organizational goals.

- Mention that although you will be working very closely with each of them in the short term, you look forward to returning to your more natural macro-management style once you all feel comfortable with the shift in operations.
- Reassure your team that you'll seek and remain open and sensitive to their feedback.
- Schedule a follow up meeting where the group can count on evaluating and discussing team issues and recommendations as they relate to this transition.

The benefits of this approach include providing the team with short-term expectations that may help minimize the "what's this about?" distraction, while helping to create an inclusive, participatory environment.

Large-scale Scenario: You're the president of an organization that has until recently operated as an autonomous subsidiary of your parent company. The parent company is currently merging operations to provide more global and uniform corporate services. You've become aware, through various feedback, that many of your managers are finding themselves at a loss about how to respond when their employees are voicing fear and uncertainty about the future of their jobs. Morale is low and productivity is down as a result. Your tendency may be to avoid addressing the uncertainties now, since you know that the fears that your managers and employees have may very well be valid.

If you were to utilize positioning, you might prepare a presentation that would:

- Acknowledge the challenges managers are facing.
- Provide your management team with a clear outline of the organization's solid merging strategies, including the business benefits.
- Position the next six months as a natural transition period.
- Commit to training management and staff to best prepare them for leading themselves and/or others through change, including a model reflecting the myriad of reactions employees may experience.
- Provide specific language that may help managers respond to immediate employee concerns.
- Make a specific commitment to continue to support technical and/or professional development for employees, providing a benefit to employees regardless of outcomes.
- Commit to regular status updates, when appropriate.

The primary benefits of this approach are that employees are acknowledged and reassured that the organization continues to value their feelings and contributions by providing every possible resource to help them through the pending changes.

Whether you're about to implement a large-scale reorganization or simply focus on one individual's performance improvement, the answer to this question may help you prepare to position the shift: How can I best engage this individual or team during the next phase of this strategy, transition or change? **BSM**

Donna Rawady is an executive coach and founder of Goal Oriented Training & Consulting. She can be reached at 585-271-6486, or by e-mail at drawing@rochester.rr.com.