Success Strategies
Tips for Leadership and Organizational Transformation

The Value of Self-compassion

Normally, we think of compassion only as something to feel toward others. The irony is that having compassion toward others requires as a prerequisite having compassion toward ourselves.

For example, as we learn to be patient with ourselves when we make a mistake, we are more able to be patient with others. Acknowledge your shortcomings and work toward change, but don't beat yourself up for your shortcomings. You will find that your ability to be compassionate toward others – even those who may disappoint you, repulse you, or slight you – will expand. Compassion toward others sets forth a state of constructive mutual enlightenment and growth.

How to Be in Conflict Effectively

Many people are not aware that conflict can be beneficial, nor do they know how to be in conflict effectively. It is important to use conflict effectively because conflict is not only inevitable, but it also plays a crucial role in development. Conflict indeed plays a necessary role in spurring innovation or moving a relationship to a higher level of understanding. So how can we be in conflict effectively? Warner B. Wims, Ph.D., offers the following suggestions.

- Depersonalize the conflict. See if you can describe it in terms of a conflict over ideas, approaches, resources, and so forth, rather than a personal conflict. This requires stepping back from any negative emotions engendered by the conflict. Don't deny your feelings. Accept them but look beyond them at the structure or ingredients of the conflict itself. Explain your point of view and listen to the other person's point of view. Seek areas where there is agreement as a starting point for sorting out the more divergent areas.

- Don't blame. If you engage the other person about the conflict from the point of view of blaming them, or yourself, you merely escalate the conflict. You get the other person's "back up" by putting them on the defensive. You eclipse acknowledging your possible role in contributing to the conflict.

- Keep your emotions on an even keel. Although you may be upset and angry, going overboard with their expression inspires the other person to also get emotional – both of you are then driven to obscure the facts.

- Attention to the facts is paramount for resolving conflict constructively. Additionally, consider the possibility that you are upset about something that is completely unintended by the other party.

- Surface the conflict. A conflict that exists but is never acknowledged could become a ticking time-bomb, exploding at unpredictable times and in unexpected ways. Often we avoid surfacing a conflict because we over-estimate the possibility that it will make things worse, when normally it makes things better.

- Be aware of your own motivation. Are you motivated by wanting to have a better relationship? Are you motivated by wanting greater personal success? What about the success of others?

- Create a safe environment. Seek to maintain an environment or relationship where it is safe to bring up a conflict without engendering hurt feelings or animosity. This requires establishing a track record where conflict is raised and resolved without blame, personalization, or negative emotions. Once this is established, conflict becomes an opportunity for greater understanding and innovation.

How Innovation-Ready is Your Organization?

Good ideas, even outstanding ones, abound within all organizations. These ideas are frequently key to major improvement. Yet, sadly, potentially groundbreaking ideas are often not recognized for their true value. The result is that the people who have good ideas often become frustrated and bewildered. There is a way, however, to view your organization that ameliorates this predicament.

Acceptance of a new idea is often a function of how ready the organization is to hear or receive the idea – a concept called "organizational readiness." There are certain characteristics of high, medium, and low readiness that you can look for. When there is high readiness, for example, your idea is more likely to be heard. If the readiness is low, try to help increase the level of readiness as a precondition of gaining acceptance for your idea. Examine the following checklist to determine how ready your organization is for new ideas:

High Readiness

- Management demonstrates openness to trying new things
- Management encourages open criticism of strategy, policies, and practices
- Management is very secure about its power and authority
- Management looks at mistakes as a learning opportunity
- Management is willing to venture into unproven territory
- Management has been given convincing data to understand the seriousness of the problem or opportunity
- There is a belief within the organization that the company can shape its own destiny
- There is an overall sense that people are working in a common direction, toward shared goals
- Members of the organization see it as being in a constant state of evolution
- There is a willingness to look at the root causes of problems

Medium Readiness

- Management is cautious but open about trying new things
- Management will tolerate open criticism of strategy, policies, and practices
- Management looks at mistakes as mistakes

Low Readiness

- Management prefers to do things "the old way"
- Management fears that its power is threatened
- Management looks at mistakes as a signal that someone should suffer consequences
- Management has been given insufficient data about the problem or opportunity
- Open criticism of senior management is a career-stopping activity
- Root causes of problems are not explored
- Members of the organization are satisfied that the organization is safe from any significant marketplace challenges.