Success Strategies

Tips for Leadership and Organizational Transformation

2007 Newsletter

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Finding Your Calling

At some point, almost everyone ponders their true "life's calling." Finding your calling is both a search and an awakening. It is a search in that we can follow clues toward answers. It is an awakening in that the clues are strewn along our path starting in childhood; we need only to open up to being aware of the evidence.

Along our life journey, there are experiences that give us energy and bring us pleasure, and there are experiences which zap us of energy and turn us off. The path to our calling is illuminated by those things that turn us on. To find our calling, we merely need to honor our own lives and look for these patterns of trace evidence of our true calling.

We also need courage. We need the courage to follow the right path without fear of being judged by others or fear of failure. We need the courage and wisdom to look at even a bad experience as a learning that gives us insight into our calling, and to look at mishaps or setbacks as opportunities. We need the courage to subjugate our temporal needs (e.g. financial security) to our higher needs. This requires believing that our survival needs will somehow be addressed. This also requires a redefinition of success to include finding satisfaction by connecting with one's calling.

It helps to think about your calling not in isolation from the rest of humanity. You are not only living for yourself, but also for others. The calling inside of you is for you and the world.

How to Speed up the Transfer of Best Practices

Best practices are typically adopted slowly. This is the case in every industry and field – whether technology, finance, healthcare, engineering, science, human resources, accounting, marketing, and even management, for example. Best practices refer to proven, successful procedures, processes, and methods. In spite of being acknowledged for their superior value, best practices are often painfully slow to transfer – not just across different companies, but also even within the same company, says Warner B. Wims, Ph.D. of WBW & Associates.

Those companies that can speed up the transfer of best practices gain a distinct advantage in the areas of quality, service, overall efficiency, and effectiveness. Few would argue with the assertion that speedy transfer of best practices results in major competitive advantage. Yet many decry why the transfer of best practices takes so long or doesn't happen at all. What can be done to speed up this transfer?

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- **A culture of ongoing improvement.** Unless each person sees that their role is not only "to do the job" but also "to make improvements," there is little incentive to look for or adopt best practices. A culture of ongoing improvement involves innovation, ferreting out waste, ongoing self-examination, fearless data transparency, a spirit of inquiry, and sharing learning and know-how about implementing change and measuring results.

- **The adaptation challenge.** Best practice transfers fail for two seemingly contradictory reasons: partial adoption and complete adoption. This is a challenging dilemma. Partial adoption can lead to failure because crucial components may be left out (e.g. during preparation for the adoption or in adoption design) which made the best practice a success elsewhere. On the other hand, complete adoption can fail when crucial contextual factors (e.g. differences in the culture which require special attention, or differences in resources which call for creative modification to how the practice was implemented elsewhere) are overlooked. Either mistake can easily be made when attempting to adopt a best practice. Successful transfer requires a full and objective analysis of

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the best practice, as well as candor about your own particular situation.

- **Avoid snobbery.** There are, again, two seeming contradictions here: best practices are often scorned if they were "not invented here" and likewise scorned if they were "invented here" (rather than coming from a "premier company"). The former finds naysayers complaining, "We're different; that practice could not work at this company." The latter faces those who say, "That best practice came out of that other division of our company, so it must not be as good as a best practice that comes from, say, GE or the Mayo Clinic." The solution lies in an objective evidence-based approach—eliminating all snobbery or prejudice—as to what is truly a best practice.

- **Give exposure.** Many companies have a successful best practice in one division or department that is simply not given the broad recognition that helps others become aware that it exists. Increase opportunities to hear what others are doing, e.g. positive results from a pilot project, experience with an implementation, or research results using a control group that show the added value evidenced by an experiment with a new practice. Use multiple sources for communicating the best practice including meetings, multimedia, the company intranet, and award events.

- **Don't rely only upon "leaders."** Transfers often fail because the information about the best practice does not get exposure deep enough within the organization. Staff people below the executives, including front line personnel, are sometimes in a better position to see the value of a best practice and to implement it successfully.

- **Push & pull.** "Push" refers to pushing known best practices on the organization from the top down. "Pull" refers to setting the expectation that departments will, on their own, continuously look for and draw in viable best practices. Push may include non-adopters being required to make a business case for why they are not adopting the best practice. Push also includes making results transparent across the organization so that different units see how well they are doing compared to others. Pull comes from creating a culture of ongoing improvement that supports and values involvement, empowerment, and listening to new ideas. Pull also comes from helping potential adoptees to understand how adopting the best practice is in their best interest.

- **Encourage risk-taking.** People need to feel that they can try something new, fail at it, and yet be given credit if they made a commendable effort.

- **Evidenced-based.** Evidence of best practice success must be made available and linked to a business case that demonstrates expected gains when adopting the practice, or losses or waste when not adopting it. Don't ask others to simply rely on the reputation of a best practice; close examination of the evidence may show that its reputation exceeds its actual value. When justified by the evidence, help people see the best practice as either solving a problem they have or creating an opportunity.

- **Transferability.** Ensure that the best practice is not unique to a certain set of circumstances, but that it is in fact transferable. Also ensure that the unit wishing to adopt the best practice has the right talent in place or develops the prerequisite competencies for making the adoption successful.

- **Address conflicting priorities.** Some units may resist best practices because they have other priorities which make adopting a best practice a low priority. Examine the facts and issues behind the priority conflict. Determine whether there is a point at which putting off the best practice will make adopting it in the future even more difficult. Ensure that everyone understands the full value of the best practice as measured against the other priorities.

- **Provide toolkits and support.** It is not enough to broadly explain a best practice. Develop toolkits—guides to help people to see how the best practice can enhance their situation, paired with tools and techniques for implementing the practice. Ask for support and guidance from those who have had direct success adopting the best practice.

- **Reward.** Reward adopters of best practices. Include financial incentives as well as non-financial incentives such as public recognition. Give credit to the source of the best practice.

Open Conversation

An open conversation involves not just giving your point of view, but also listening and sharing with the purposeful intention of permitting a higher truth to emerge. This orientation to the conversation requires each participant to manage his or her ego need to "be right." The result is more insight for all parties.

Effective Front Line Teams

An effective front line team can be of value in several ways:

- It generates and processes ideas from a variety of people who are directly involved in the work, including those who interface with customers or with key operations. Front line involvement in decisions makes for better decisions, says Warner B. Wims, Ph.D. of WBW & Associates.
- It helps employees feel empowered to make a difference, resulting in increased satisfaction and identification with results.
- It creates a sense of mutual accountability beyond what a supervisor or manager alone can generate.
- It provides avenues for employees who are close to the action, and who share responsibility for implementing the results, to address relevant problems, issues, and opportunities.

How can you increase the effectiveness of front line teams?

- **Goals.** A group without clear goals will drift out of existence. Identify short and long-term goals and their measures of success. Which goals fall within the prerogative of the team? Which goals are internally generated within the team versus from higher levels of management, and how do you integrate the two? Which are team goals and which are individual goals? Where can the team be most effective? How does the work of the team link with the overall performance needs of the organization?
- **Membership and roles.** This includes determining who should be on the team and clarifying expectations for each member. It also includes clarifying meeting management roles (e.g. facilitators, communicators, implementers). How will ongoing individual responsibilities and team meeting responsibilities coincide? How will input be gathered?
- **Scope.** This includes determining what falls within the purview of the team versus that of other organizational entities.
- **Working with multiple teams.** This includes clarifying the relationships between the particular front line team and other teams, including how to combine the efforts of more than one team.
- **Knowledge and skill development.** This entails educating team members on the major elements of effective teams, including the purpose of the team, ground rules, and working practices. Given the goals of the team, what additional skills are needed? How will these skills be acquired? How will the acquisition of these skills be integrated into the ongoing workload?
- **Creative joint-problem solving.** An advantage of a team is the ability to reap the benefit of different perspectives. How can individual perspectives within the team be brought together creatively to solve problems?
- **Establishing trust.** Teams are most effective when members trust that they will be heard, that other members care about them, and that there are no negative consequences for their ideas or participation.

  •**Conflict resolution.** Learn and employ the most effective and constructive ways to resolve conflicts.

  •**Facilitation.** This includes determining facilitation options and approaches that will best create involvement, commitment, and results.

  •**Meeting protocols.** How often will the group meet? Who can call a meeting? How are meetings planned? How are decisions made? How is communication handled between meetings?
- **Higher management support.** Higher management must understand how to support the team rather than impede its success. This includes updating the supervisory culture from one based on giving orders to one based primarily on helping managers learn how to act as guides, facilitators and coaches.
- **Aligning incentives.** This includes determining how individual and team performance will be recognized, and ensuring that both individual and team-based rewards are aligned.
- **Gaining results.** The ultimate test of the accountability and success of teams is if they can succeed in achieving exceptional results.

Front line involvement in decisions makes for better decisions.

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What is Team Effectiveness Coaching?

Team Effectiveness Coaching (TEC) is an approach that WBW & Associates, LLC uses to increase the effectiveness of teams by providing relevant, ongoing, and/or "just-in-time" (i.e., when the team is ready) coaching based on specific goals that the team has set for itself, e.g. quality goals, service goals, cost reduction goals, partnership goals, working relationship goals. TEC is provided either directly to the team, or as thought partners to team leaders, human resources, or other organizational entities such as internal training and organizational development resources.

For more information about the WBW & Associates, LLC approach to Team Effectiveness Coaching, go to www.teameffectivenesscoaching.com.

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Manager as Coach

Coaching skill is a subset of management skill. Sound management involves planning, organizing, providing technical knowledge, and giving direction. Coaching is that part of management that does not involve telling people what to do as much as it involves helping people to see for themselves what they need to do. As a result, it can be a challenge to put on the "coaching hat."

Coaching is a highly motivating, encouraging and lasting approach since individuals being coached are more aware of their choices and, as a result, take responsibility for their own development and are more committed to change.

Coaching Skills for Managers:

Partnering. Partnering involves conveying a sense of mutual respect. Partnering acknowledges that you, as coach, may not have all of the answers, but you provide an opportunity for others to clarify their thinking and needs.

Listening. Be careful about your selective listening ("hearing what you want to hear") and be sure to convey that you are in fact listening (e.g., paraphrasing what you heard). Listening may also require that you not talk nearly as much as you normally would. Listening deeply involves hearing–not just the actual words, but hearing the individual's interests and concerns behind the words.

Provide Context. Explain the context for the work to be performed by conveying the larger business strategy and how each person fits into the achievement of that strategy.

Facilitate Action. Facilitate others doing their job by harnessing resources, removing barriers and creating a supportive environment

Providing Feedback. Focus on behaviors and other facts when providing feedback. You are acting as a coach, not a psychologist delving into internal motivation. Address both strengths and needs, not just one side of the equation. Help individuals to zero in on specifics.

Developmental Planning. Don't just wing-it. Help to identify developmental goals for individuals and the team, and work together to create an action plan.

Collaboration Support. Help others to resolve conflicts and increase collaboration, including working more effectively with others across the organization or on teams.

Encouraging/Motivating. As a coach, your role is to stimulate the desire to learn and achieve — not just tell people they need to learn and achieve.

Challenging. While being encouraging and motivating, you must also help individuals and teams to challenge themselves. For example, help them to envision specific, measurable levels of achievement that stretch beyond what they previously thought possible.

Self-Evaluating. Be self-aware of how well you are doing as a coach. In fact, occasionally ask those you are coaching how you are being helpful.