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One In Three Don't Adapt To Changes

By Joseph Johnson

We recently surveyed over 100 senior human resource professionals to learn more about the adaptability of today's workforce in today's tumultuous environment. The survey asked: Is your workforce able to adapt to change and increase their effectiveness on the job? Results were as follows:

- 31 percent — No, employee engagement and productivity are a major risk;

- 43 percent — Somewhat, our workforce gets the job done, but morale suffers;

- 26 percent — Yes, our workforce is very agile and responds to new challenges.

These findings are consistent with what businesses in Connecticut face as they wrestle with difficult changes, from reductions in force to radical restructuring.

Most organizations don't properly implement a sustainable, business-aligned change management program. As a result, employees have little to grasp onto to help them understand what is required of them in the new environment and motivate them to want to make the change. The consequence is that most change management programs fail to deliver sustainable results, undermining an organization's ability to evolve or shift to a new strategy.

The most common obstacles stem from a lack of planning, preparedness and skill in managing the change process.

Here are some tips on how Connecticut-based organizations can help their workforces



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adapt to change, maintain employee engagement and productivity, and accelerate performance to new heights:

1. Learn from the lessons of the past. Change management isn't about posters, slogans, or workshops. Change management is about sustainable and continuous individual, team, and corporate evolution and transformation. To succeed, understand how previous changes were received and acted on. Work at and involve all levels in the organization to learn what has worked in the past, what hasn't, and most important the "why" of both.

2. Involve and align top leadership. Leaders need to drive change throughout the organization. Our experience suggests that change efforts do not succeed without an aligned leadership mantra.

3. Identify people who are may be change champions or potential stumbling blocks. Individuals need an objective assessment of their own strengths and weaknesses when confronted with change. A change readiness assessment can be part of the process to identify those employees with the strongest change skill set. Additionally, it provides managers with a common language of performance that allows them to discuss how an individual's behaviors might affect the group dynamic.

4. Map out how the change will occur and its impact on the business. Pinpoint the key areas in which employees are likely to be affected — anything from a workforce reduction, where the remaining employees must contend with doing more work with fewer resources, to the implementation of a new software where employees may be asked to learn new skills. Even good communications won't solve uncertainty, motivate

employees, or solve fundamental process issues if the path appears unclear or vague.

5. Construct an effective communications system. Communications isn't one way. Listen to employees. Often, employee feedback will reveal significant gaps in how the change is understood. Build effective feedback into everything you do. Publicize the significant and subtle wins that are being achieved.

6. Provide adequate support, development and enablers for line managers to lead employees through the change. This may take the form of group or one-on-one interactions. Managers should hold individual meetings with each team member. Senior leaders may require one-on-one coaching.

7. Keep score; measurement is key. Too many businesses overlook the scoreboard when implementing any kind of change. If we fail to help employees understand where they are in the game, is, how can we ask them to adjust what they are doing?

Define success at the outset and the metrics to be used to assess whether you've achieved your goals and objectives.

Without an effective change management strategy, productivity drops, service quality declines, unwanted turnover and absenteeism increases, customer loyalty wanes and often the organization's brand reputation is tarnished. And all of that, of course, ultimately affects the bottom line. ■

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