

Leadership Development

Creating More Positive Places to Work



RIGHT VIEWPOINT™

The uncertain economy has forced many companies to cut costs in the face of declining revenues. The resulting impact has set in motion cycles of disruptive changes within most organizations. Some managers have struggled to handle the dynamic pace of change. Engagement, retention, productivity and performance are all suffering as a result of poor communication, erosion of trust, lack of customer focus, ineffective strategic thinking and the inability to link one's workforce with the business strategy.

Many organizations expect their leaders to manage change effectively, but few companies provide the tools and techniques that leaders need to be successful. Consequently, 67% of senior executives and human resource professionals polled by Right Management say that change at work is frequently having a negative impact on workers' attitudes. If change isn't handled appropriately and if people at all levels of the organization are not prepared, then negativity will follow. But when change is handled effectively, it's easier to create more positive work environments.

KEY TRENDS DRIVING WORKFORCE CHANGE

From an economic standpoint, we are emerging from a global recession, although the economy is still somewhat unstable and continues to provide us with mixed messages about the degree of recovery. There are ongoing, unprecedented levels of change in business strategies. Organizations have reacted by cutting costs and restructuring their operations. Layoffs and unemployment claims have been at record highs. Decisions have been handled quickly, often with little communication or preparation.

MICHAEL HAID

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How are employees feeling amidst this barrage of continual change? If you think some of your employees might have developed a bad attitude as a result of how they have been treated, you're probably right. The reality is that many really are feeling disgruntled, and often with good reason. Consider some of the results of recent employee studies completed by our own research team:

- 79% report their workloads have increased due to layoffs; 57% say they have increased "a lot."¹
- Two out of three failed to take their earned vacation last year.²
- As many as 60% say they want to leave their job this year.³
- 19% rarely trust their manager.⁴
- 75% usually work more than 40 hours per week.⁵
- Less than half usually take a lunch break.⁶

Consequently, a significant number of employees are probably underperforming because of poor engagement. Increased workloads, decreased confidence in corporate direction and growing mistrust of leadership have raised employee negativity while lowering productivity. Desiring better opportunities, many top performers have updated their resumes, joined various social and professional networks and are actively or passively looking for new jobs. In fact, more than half of employees reported that they had been approached to discuss a job opportunity with another employer in the past six months.⁷

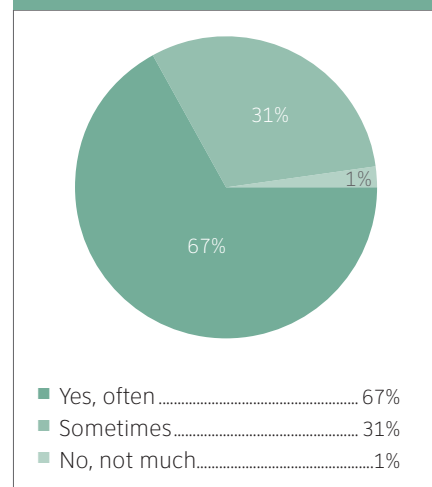
The impact of all of this? Employers must focus on managing change, engaging employees and building the skills and behaviors that both employees and employers need to thrive in today's dynamic business climate.

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF NEGATIVITY

Productivity can suffer in a workplace characterized by criticism, gossip and lack of teamwork. Right Management research found that more than 61% of organizations suffer from excessive negativity that harms performance and productivity. Nearly two out of three senior executives and human resource professionals indicated that negativity in the workplace is making it difficult for workers to focus on their jobs and these attitudes are detrimental to the work that needs to be done.

Leading in today's dynamic business climate can come with frustrations. Change is constant and often implemented with little warning or preparation. As a result, employees who are finding it challenging to adjust and adapt quickly often begin to exhibit negative behaviors. And worst of all, negativity is contagious. It's important to stop it in its tracks as soon as you start to see signs of it in your workplace.

HAVE YOU SEEN HOW CHANGE AT WORK CAN HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON WORKERS' ATTITUDES?





The signals to look for include backstabbing, gossiping, power struggles, lack of teamwork and absenteeism. When employees are bewildered by change and struggling to cope and adapt, negativity grows. As a leader, the worst thing you can do is to remain silent and permit or tolerate bad attitudes. This can result in your being seen as contributing to negative behaviors.

BREAKING THE CYCLE

Workplace negativity is hardly a new phenomenon. But it's fair to speculate that difficult business conditions make the situation worse.

Only one-third of the survey respondents said their management takes steps to address adverse attitudes or actions. It's very important not to let negativity take hold in an organization. It can travel quickly, and management must take action to prevent the erosion of morale and productivity, as well as avoid unwanted turnover. Don't ignore personality conflicts, territorial battles, sarcastic remarks and unconstructive criticism. They may become the seeds of organizational defeatism and decline.

As a leader, you are in a strong position to break the cycle. While you may not be able to make everyone happy, you can educate and inspire those around you to embrace a positive attitude.

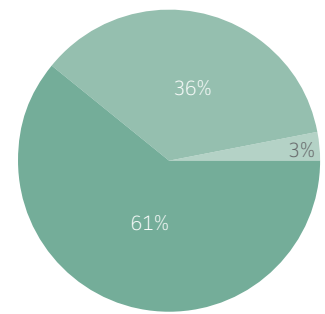
BEST PRACTICES FOR LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

It is essential that leaders develop key behaviors necessary for managing change effectively. Organizations that do not manage change well or recognize the risks to morale that change engenders are four times more likely to lose talent.

Best practices for leading others positively through change include:

- **Setting expectations.** Help employees to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them at work. This involves regular discussions to clarify goals, workloads and deliverables.
- **Communicating the vision.** Provide employees with a line of sight for how they can contribute to meeting the needs of customers. This involves alignment with the firm's vision and mission, and a clear understanding of what each individual employee can do to contribute to the organization's purpose.
- **Developing employees.** Offer training and career development to help both managers and employees feel more confident in their ability to do their jobs. This will also reduce stress and ultimately increase productivity and performance.
- **Valuing employees.** Demonstrate commitment and loyalty to employees through regular career discussions. This will also help to maintain accountability for appropriate employee behaviors and identification of support that may be needed for areas of development.

HAS NEGATIVITY AT YOUR WORK-PLACE IMPACTED PRODUCTIVITY?



- Yes, employees are struggling to focus..... 61%
- Sometimes, but we address the issues..... 36%
- No, employees are staying positive.....3%

“Negativity can become contagious, and management must take action to prevent the erosion of morale and productivity.”



TIPS FOR CREATING A POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

- **Assess.** Understand your reactions to changes and your authentic beliefs about where these changes are taking the organization.
- **Start with yourself.** Check your language and behaviors; show zero tolerance for negativity, and lead by example.
- **Keep open lines of communication.** Keep employees informed about what's happening in the organization and be available to listen to concerns.
- **Don't validate or encourage negativity.** Counsel the complainer and challenge negative and pessimistic thinking and beliefs.
- **Ask for solutions.** Recognize positive behaviors and ask open-ended questions, then listen and help develop solutions.

CONCLUSION

Effectively leading through change will go a long way to ensure your talent is aligned with the overall business strategy and that employees are committed to doing their part to achieve business goals. Preparing workforces to respond confidently and competently, and to work effectively toward a new direction, reduces negative reactions, mitigates the risk of turnover, improves morale and boosts productivity.

¹ Right Management surveyed 845 individuals in March 2010 via an online poll.

² Right Management surveyed 667 people in December 2009 via an online poll.

³ Right Management surveyed 904 employees in October 2009 via an online poll.

⁴ Right Management surveyed 4,334 individuals in May 2010 via an online poll.

⁵ Right Management polled 2,904 workers in August 2010 via an online poll.

⁶ Right Management polled 2,311 workers in August 2010 via an online poll.

⁷ Right Management surveyed 3,316 individuals in May 2010 via an online poll.

About the Author

Michael Haid is Senior Vice President for Right Management's Global Solutions Team. He is a global thought leader for the Talent Management practice, responsible for driving the strategy and execution of the organization's Talent Assessment capabilities. He has more than 20 years' experience and he supports a network of Regional Champions and Subject Matter Experts to lead the design and implementation of global, scalable solutions for capabilities, such as competency modeling and individual, team and organizational assessment.

About Right Management

Right Management (www.right.com) is the talent and career management expert within Manpower, a world leader in innovative workforce solutions. Right Management helps clients win in the changing world of work by designing and executing workforce solutions that align talent strategy with business strategy. Our expertise spans Talent Assessment, Leader Development, Organizational Effectiveness, Employee Engagement, and Workforce Transition and Outplacement. With offices in over 50 countries, Right Management partners with companies of all sizes. More than 80 percent of Fortune 500 companies are currently working with us to help them grow talent, reduce costs and accelerate performance.

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