



EFFECTIVELY LEADING AN ORGANIZATION THROUGH TIMES OF CHANGE

By: Jeffrey W. Ganthner, AIA

Surviving change can make or break an organization. In times of change, leaders are challenged the most to perform for their organization. Therefore, it is extremely important that leaders stay true, cast a clear vision, and act decisively to successfully lead an organization through change.

Admiral Vern Clark in his video series on Great Leadership, states that “people buy into the leader before they buy into the vision.” This calls for leaders to first focus on leading themselves, before they look to leading an organization and especially before they cast a vision that requires organizational change. Rich Drinon agrees with Admiral Clark when he writes in *Refining Your Leadership Philosophy and Style* that “because leaders are on display 24/7/365, they are always exposed to issues of character, capability, and trust. There is no escaping the expectations of others.” Leaders need to stay true to effectively cast a vision. A leader who does not have the backing of their organization will not be successful in leading that organization and definitely not through times of change – when the challenge is the greatest.

If a leader is supported by their organization, they are then ready to cast a clear vision. This involves three steps as defined by Admiral Clark: who we are, what we believe in and where we are going. The first two may be overlooked by a leader since they really do not address an action. However, they are extremely important. Michael Hyatt discusses in his article The Leadership Strategy of Jesus that Jesus spent a lot of time leading himself and investing deeply in three persons (Peter, James, and John), training 12 persons (the disciples), and mobilizing 70 persons to act so that the multitudes (the overall church) can grow and thrive. By showing who He was to the innermost part of his organization, Jesus gained the disciples trust and an understanding of who they were, who the overall organization was and how they fit in to it. Simply put, they knew who they were and what they believed in. Jesus modeled the priorities that successful leaders practice prior to casting a vision. They were secure and clear with who and what the organization was. Now they could focus on where they needed to go. And where you need to go often involves change.

Times of change require clarity of vision. Picture a ship's crew at sea without clear knowledge of where they are going. It really does not matter how fast they go or how well the crew handles the ship – if they are lost then they are not effective. Defining a vision is important to an organization. Admiral Clark discusses that a leader must first define and then refine a vision. That same ship's crew with a clear vision and sailing towards fulfilling a certain mission is an effective crew just like an organization with a clear vision and advancing towards a defined mission through a sea of marketplace change. Refinements and slight course adjustments may occur, but true leaders who keep a steady focus on the vision and mission will inspire their entire organization to follow.

Leaders need to implement sound leadership skills to effectively guide an organization through change. One is the ability to gain knowledge and the second is the ability (courage) to act on that knowledge (David Garvin in The Importance of Learning in Organizations). A leader who learns can be an effective leader because they are open to change and willing to grow themselves. They know that change often starts with themselves. Success in changing oneself is an indicator that leader can be effective in changing an organization. Having the ability to

implement a change is one thing; however, having the courage to do it is another. Leaders need to understand that risk management is part of the job and that if they have done all they can to prepare (gain knowledge and train others) then they need to decisively act on that knowledge and implement change. Change implemented poorly can often be avoided if the leader is committed to lifelong learning and has the resolve to act decisively.

Effective leadership starts by first being able to lead yourself and then gaining the trust and commitment of those that you lead. Leaders cast a clear vision and have the courage to act. The survival of an organization in changing times often depends on the effectiveness of a leader to learn, adapt, and act.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeffrey W. Ganthner, AIA is a proven and well diversified professional expertise leading teams and organizations in the architecture, engineering, construction and technology industries. Jeffrey casts the vision for innovative thought, leadership, and solutions. He has led a distinguished and diverse career as an architect, engineer, designer, teacher entrepreneur, and business leader. He can be reached at jeff@leadershiphunt.com.