EA Insights

EXECUTIVE ADVANTAGE LLC

"Things Are Gonna Change Around Here!"

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Dear Friend,

Things Are Gonna Change Around Here!

Picture the scene.

People...heads down...diligently at work.

Suddenly, the boss flies into the room, bellowing that familiar, but dreaded, line: "Things are gonna change around here!"

Ever *experienced* this?

Ever *done* this?

Interestingly, when you think about it, that famous, or infamous, statement does call for change. However, it implies that most, if not all, of the needed changes will rest with the statement's hearers. What's often lost is that, for real change to occur, it must start with, and continually be nurtured by, that statement's speaker.

Join me for this month's edition of *EA Insights*. We'll take a look at the job of leaders in bringing about meaningful change.

All the best,

June

June Melvin Mickens
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How Leaders Contribute to Meaningful Change

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There comes a time in the life of any organization, department, or team, when the need for change becomes apparent. Whether prompted by customer feedback, rising costs, plummeting revenue, technology improvements, or any number of other causes, the conclusion remains the same-- something different is required. Change must occur.

People who are faced with situations requiring change --personally or organizationally --often reach out to us, here at *Executive Advantage*. For a few moments, though, let's focus on our interactions with the leaders of businesses or groups that are in the midst of change.

In exploratory conversations with these folks, one of my key questions is, *"What have you tried before?"* And, the responses usually are varied and interesting. Those responses lead me to my follow-up question:*"Why do you think that hasn't worked?"* And, to that, I typically get answers that range from economic theories, to personnel issues of one sort or another, to unreasonable customer challenges, to technology and equipment drawbacks, and so on. Never have I heard a leader, at that point anyway, be totally self-aware and transparent, and admit that he or she didn't lead those earlier change efforts well.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not insinuating that, when change efforts

are unsuccessful, the entire blame rests squarely at the feet of the group's leader. Not at all!

What I do believe, though, is that, for change efforts to have any possibility of success, that group leader must make a meaningful contribution -- a contribution that goes beyond simply dictating how the operation or its people must be altered in order to turn things around. Change won't occur, or it won't last, when the leader is detached the process. The leader's contribution must start the effort; it must carry on throughout the effort; and it must be an intimate part of the effort.

So, how can leaders contribute to meaningful change? Let me offer four leadership actions that are essential to any change effort. I call them "*The EX Cycle.*"

Action #1: EX-plaining -- Help folks understand what you're trying to accomplish, the change you want to bring about. Help them see why that change is important to the work you do, to them, to customers, to the community, to the environment, whatever. Often, people disregard the demands for change because the change makes no sense to them. So, explaining is essential. And, don't just tell them once; find ways to weave the rationale and the impact into conversations on an ongoing basis. Don't get tired of sharing the *what* and the *why* of the change effort.

Action #2: EX-hibiting -- Change... You can't just *talk* about it; you've got to *show* it. It's not enough to have everyone else living by the new rules; you've got to do it too. In fact, you've got to do it first! Even on those days when it just would be easier to function "the old way", the leader has to be the poster child for the changed state. As a leader, if your words consistently match your actions, the change will take off and become the norm sooner among the rest of the team (or you'll begin to figure out the folks who are better suited in other environments).

Action #3: EX-pecting -- Want to bring about a change? Build the living out of the new practice into your expectations for the people around you. Folks need to know that this isn't just a "nice to do" thing; it's a "need to do" thing. It's not just a passing fancy or the flavor of the month. They need to know that you're serious about the change -- for yourself and for them. They need to know that you expect that this is how you all will be functioning going forward.

Action #4: EX-amining -- This is an offshoot of the "Expecting" EX. It's added, though, because sometimes *expecting* becomes a passive response. *Examining* makes it active. Examining means that you're actually going to be looking for the change to be demonstrated in the conduct and/or performance of team members. Folks need to know that they can't short-circuit the change and then justify their corner-cutting by pointing to good results. Any change that was necessary enough to adopt is necessary enough to enforce (until adjusted). Through ongoing examination, you send the message that you'll be enforcing that change. It's the leader's responsibility to ensure that the change is woven into what you're seeking as you work with folks, as you monitor their progress and outcomes, and as you provide feedback about their efforts. It means you've got to hold people accountable for functioning in this way. And, it means that, as the leader, they have the right to look to you as an example of accountability in this area.

Promoting change is difficult, but not impossible. It won't happen overnight, but with the right effort, and with continuing effort, you'll begin to see the transformation.

Need help with your organization or individual change effort? Contact us today to explore how *Executive Advantage* can partner with you. We're here to help you build your thriving **business** or **career**.

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success[.] Exhibiting outstanding leadership, he has built teams that have captured many opportunities. [We] believe that under [his] leadership, [we] will continue to create value and grow."
~Charles Koch

"I certainly had a sense that this was someone who wanted to be part of change.... I think she wanted to make a contribution, and I think she made a very powerful and worthwhile contribution."
~Martin McGuinness

"Well, status quo wasn't working. For whatever reason, we weren't getting the response we thought we would.... I try and explain myself, not just telling them what we're doing but why we're doing it and why it's going to help us long-term."
~Brad Shaw

"It was a great way to examine what I do and to receive appropriate feedback in order to become ... even better[.]"
~Sharyn Stein

"I think you have to take care of your own job, really worry about yourself and really examine how you're playing individually. You have to be a leader; you have to do things the right way."
~Mark Tauscher

"If something is so complicated that you can't explain it in 10 minutes, then it's probably not worth knowing anyways."
~Bill Watterson

About Executive Advantage

At *Executive Advantage*, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

To learn more about *Executive Advantage*, contact us **online** or at **(301) 280-5950**.

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