

# LEADING THROUGH UNCERTAIN TIMES

How to prevent a performance dip during major organizational change

**I**t is very difficult to lead during uncertain times, especially when leaders don't have immediate answers that employees crave. It can take six to 18 months for a reorganization to be complete, to close facilities and transition people out, to finalize a sale or merger or to fend off an unwanted takeover. Leaders often are ill-equipped to help employees through the emotional trauma of such changes, while keeping them engaged to maintain business

performance.

The performance dip does not need to happen and can be avoided. Many believe that a performance dip is unavoidable during times of intense change. Not true. Many high-performing organizations have demonstrated, over and over, that major change does not have to cause a performance dip. Well-led companies are resilient — able

to absorb significant change — while maintaining or even enhancing performance. And they do it in ways that their employees notice and deeply appreciate.

Leaders of these high-performing organizations focus on the following five critical things, and do them very well.

## 1. Achieve business targets

During change, each employee loses an average of

two hours of productivity a day. Leaders often shy away from asking for performance results, especially during times of emotional upheaval. But leaders must focus employees on specific business targets, provide the structure people need amid the uncertainty created by the change and ensure that productivity does not dip.

## 2. Support employees through the change

When change happens in an organization, employees want to know that their leaders care. Most leaders do care; they just have a hard time showing it, especially when emotions run high because employees fear or resent the change or because leaders themselves have difficulty adapting to the change. Leaders must help employees overcome the negative feelings that come with change, reframe unproductive thoughts and beliefs, and unfreeze and try new behaviors to become personally resilient.

## 3. Track and resolve issues

Many unusual issues arise during times of change. Leaders can gain tremendous loyalty from employees by taking issues seriously and resolving them promptly. Keep a log of issues raised. Get back to people on what you learn. Let them know what you don't know or can't find out. Your honesty and follow-through, even when you don't

have answers, will win you great loyalty and discretionary performance.

## 4. Retain key personnel

This is the time when key people begin exploring their options — including leaving. Leaders need to take deliberate action to ensure that people know they are valued and are key assets to the company. Leaders need to take action every week to retain these key employees. The goal is to have no surprises. If a key performer is going to leave, leaders need to know in advance and have a manageable transition plan ready.

## 5. Communicate about the change

If leaders are not adequately prepared to answer employees' questions and communicate the case for change and other key messages, it can stall progress and cause unnecessary churn. Leaders prepared with change communication tools feel confident and ready to talk openly about what is happening and are able to customize these discussions to meet employees' needs.

Business today is synonymous with change. Leading well through periods of intense change requires a commitment to do so and the specific actions listed above to make it happen without a performance dip. <<

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