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THE NEWSLETTER OF WOLF CONSULTING

ALIGNING PROCESS, STRUCTURE & PEOPLE FOR RESULTS

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callings

Taking Care of Your Staff During Critical Change

Transitions are all too common in organizations. Private or public sector, a major change in players or reorganization affects every individual. Each employee, being unique, reacts differently. So how do you take care of your staff members in a way that suits their individual needs?

First, let's consider why it's important to take care of your staff members. This subject is seldom a priority in organizational change. After all, you have a staff of professionals. They are used to changes. Change is a constant nowadays. They should simply "get over it."

Sure, they may get over it, but at what price to the organization? A few people may move on. Productivity may dip for a time. So what? Well, consider the original reason the change is being implemented. There are usually sound business reasons and positive results you expect to take place in the organization. The intended results should make the organization more efficient/more cost-effective/faster/etc. And what is the largest risk factor standing between your organization and success? People. People and how they behave in owning the change and working to make it successful.

Is this a given? It should be. But the world of organizations does not seem to be willing to internalize the lesson. This important piece of the puzzle often slips into the background or is relegated to the Communication Plan as an afterthought. Yes, communication is impor-

tant to employees. They need to know what is happening, why, and when, etc., but at the time they receive these facts, it is essential for staff members to know what the facts mean to them personally.

People are motivated by their emotions. Remember feelings? When you were a child, you laughed and cried. You got angry and threw yourself down on the floor and threw tantrums. You were afraid of the dark. You loved your Grandma because she let you do things your Mom wouldn't. Now that you are grown you don't have those feelings anymore, right? Not true. You have simply become clever about masking your feelings in socially acceptable, adult ways. Those ways can include a host of destructive behaviors that can quickly poison an organization. And they are often triggered by insecurities that change can bring to an employee's emotional forefront.

The permutations of destructive behavior are as varied as the individuals who populate your organization. Knowing this, management is motivated to nip as much of this in the bud as possible, early in the change process.

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Three things were different about your workshop.

1) It was focused specifically on the group of people I work with 2) Your activities asked us to specifically focus on what we had learned about ourselves and our co-workers to reach a goal (a.k.a. put the knowledge in motion).

3) Your presentation allowed us to learn without pushing us outside our comfort zones.
– State government seminar participant

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A far better approach is to begin before you know you are going to have a change. Lay the groundwork as an ongoing part of the way you manage people. Ensure that each person is supervised in a quality way. Invest in your supervisors to guarantee that they are skilled in showing individual respect, taking care of the real needs of their staff, fostering an atmosphere of trust and running a continual dialog with their employees concerning individual career paths. If an organization can achieve this base with a large percentage of staff, any change will be easier. At the same time you naturally benefit from improvements in your ongoing results.

So how to best prepare for change? Begin with a free flow of information. Work early on with each individual to develop personal transition plans, even if you aren't yet sure of what all the change means. And most importantly, invest in a plan to include key Before, After and Transition states to eventually answer the question on each individual's mind: "What does this mean to me?" Picture a form with three columns:

1) The Before (or Now) column lists the dimensions of the person's current job. Job title, supervisor's name, responsibilities, skills needed, location, working hours/conditions, etc.

2) As the information around change becomes known, the supervisor and employee begin to fill in the "After" col-

umn. Each new fact becomes a subject for discussion around impact.

3) The power in this approach then becomes the "Transition" column. What is needed to get from Before to After? Training? Introduction to new team? How will old responsibilities be handed off and to whom? When? What materials need to change hands? What stakeholders are involved? Are there any other considerations?

The process of filling in the blanks builds confidence in the staff member and in that person's supervisor. Important issues will arise that can go back up the chain for resolution. It becomes more obvious which parts of the change are as yet undecided, giving the employee a sense of ease with the unknown. But most of all it is personal. And making it personal is what successful change-management is all about. In successful change-management, individuals understand how they will be affected, and that brings each person's energy and creativity to bear positively on the results. This minimizes time and energy required for damage control and maximizes sought after results.

Do you need help deciding how to best leverage scarce funding for contractors? Wolf Consulting specializes in small, quick engagements to help you step back and take a fresh look at what's on your plate to make your best resource investment decision. Spend a little to ensure the large amount you plan to spend will give you the best value for your resourcing dollar.

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