The Four Things You Must Do to Lead Your Team through a Transformation

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Leadership is something that, frankly, is not in abundance within most IT organizations. If you are reading this article, you most likely are already part of this exclusive group of leaders - because only a leader is constantly searching out ways to improve.

Leading a transformation effort requires all of the leadership skills you probably already have, but they must be applied very deliberately to be effective in this context. The reason is that, in many cases, leadership is simply about vision and confidence. You set the course and move confidently toward it and your team follows. While this is a critical part of what is needed, a transformation effort is as much about building leaders as it is about leading.

To successfully lead an IT transformation effort, there are four things you must do:

- **Become the Change Champion**
- **Fund & Splash**
- **Protect & Serve**
- **Let Them Fail (Sort of!)**

Become the Change Champion

The first and most important thing you must do to become a transformational leader is to become the walking and talking embodiment of change. One of the greatest barriers to change will be simple inertia.

Your team has heard this all before. The road to the modern IT organization is littered with discarded, abandoned and failed change efforts. You really cannot blame your team for believing that real change never occurs.

You need to change that.

Pick something small, but meaningful, that requires you to change how you operate and change it - very publicly. It could be that you say you expect to be called any time there is a Major Incident - no matter what day or time. Perhaps it could be that you will now personally approve any Major Change or that you will personally conduct the Major Incident Review Meeting and will be focused on process breakdowns rather than heroic efforts. Whatever it is, it should:

- Affect you personally and require that you must obviously and visibly change your behavior
- Require personal investment on your part - it cannot be simple and convenient
- Be meaningful - no window dressing here

The point of this is to send a powerful message to your team that change is really coming this time around - and that it is starting with you. Shout it from the rooftops every chance you get and ensure your team understands just how seriously you are taking this effort.

Fund & Splash

One of the most important tactical tasks that you must perform is to fund your transformational effort. This sounds obvious, but this is about much more than just giving the program the money it needs. Funding is a very powerful symbol for what the IT leadership team values. Many transformation programs have died a painful death because they become all

sizzle and no steak. Despite talking and hyping, when it comes time to move forward, the funding does not materialize. It takes the wind out of the sails and sends a clear message to the team that the leadership did not value the effort as much as they claimed and are not really serious about change.

You need to avoid this fate by publicly funding your effort to give it both the sizzle and the steak. This really means a couple of things. First, be realistic about what this is going to take. Recognize that the vast majority of your "expense" is going to be the time of your internal staff. But based on your transformational goals, you may need some outside consulting help, some augmentation resources to free up your team and possibly some tools. Whatever you think you may need, do not be timid. Get the funding. If you cannot or do not want to go to bat right now, then wait until you are ready to do so.

Launching a transformation effort without the funding, and symbolic statement it makes, is a sure recipe for failure.

With the funding in hand, make a splash.

Hold Town Halls. Send emails. Send broadcast voicemails. Send the message loud and clear that this effort is one of your most important and critical priorities. Make sure your whole team knows that you have funded it with some large chunk of money - to prove how important it is. Leave no room for doubt or failure. Make it clear that this effort will succeed.

Protect & Serve

As you get your effort underway, your role will largely shift to the Protector-in-Chief. Your transformation effort will be in a fragile state as it gets started and, even in the best organizations, there will be a small army of people trying to consciously or sub-consciously undermine it.

People fear change. If you have become the embodiment of change and have funded your effort with a splash, your teams will be getting the message that change is coming. That can create a lot of anxiety and uncertainty and lead some members of your team to make some irrational decisions. You need to protect your effort and give it time to succeed.

There are two critical things that you should do to protect your effort:

- Respect the Decisions of Your Program Team: One way that the effort will be undermined is that decisions of the program team will be called into question. While no one should ever be afraid of constructive feedback, you must resist the temptation to simply overrule your program teams for the sake of expediency. If one of your direct reports raises an issue with a decision made by some element of the program, direct them to the program team and its governance structure to resolve the issue. If you undermine the authority of the program team, change will not happen.
- Support the Effort in Day-to-Day Management: Even more than merely not overruling decisions, you must strive to begin consuming whatever changes come out of the program and embed them into your day-to-day management practices. Has the program created new metrics? Then review them as part of your on-going operational review meetings. Have new change criteria been put in place? Ask for a review of changes by your management team based on these criteria.

Your on-going and visible support of the effort will be critical to its long-term success. It can be easy to get consumed in your day-to-day responsibilities and want to believe that you have done all you must to support the effort. But it will require you to consciously think about how you can visibly give the effort the full weight of your support every day. Respecting decisions, embedding its deliverables in your day to-day work, showing up at program events, offering personal encouragement to team members - all of these actions will give your team the protection they need to make your effort a success.

Let Them Fail (Sort Of!)

The last thing you must do to effectively lead a transformation effort is both the simplest and hardest - you must let your team go through the cycle of trial and error. And that means that some of what they do will fail.

Organizational transformation can be messy. It does not follow a simple project plan. Because one of your primary goals is to create a new generation of leaders within your organization, you must empower them to lead this effort with you and give them the latitude they need to run it. They must be permitted to experiment and take risks without fear of recrimination. This means you must break through the corporate veil of infallibility and celebrate the transformation of

your organization when it succeeds and when it fails - provided that the failure is used as an opportunity to continue and improve the organization.

While this can be very difficult, it will often be during failed efforts that your team learns the most about how to truly change the organization. And this leads to explosive and exponential results. You must always react harshly to failure caused by half-hearted efforts or political maneuverings, but failure resulting from risk taking and an earnest attempt to improve the organization should be accepted and even celebrated for how it will enable the organization to continue to mature.

SUMMARY

Building a Generation of Leaders

By embracing these four characteristics and becoming a true transformational leader, you will be able to achieve significant results for your organization. Perhaps the most lasting impact of this approach, however, is the legacy of leadership that you will leave behind.

The kind of support that this requires has the effect of building confidence within your teams. They will see that true change can occur and will find within themselves character traits that they may not have known existed. They will become bolder in their passion to make the organization better. They will feel empowered that they can make a difference. And they will feel invested that they are not merely a cog in the works, but an active participant in defining the future of the organization. They will become a generation of leaders that will enable you to accelerate your efforts and achieve impactful business results for years to come.

About the Author

Charles Araujo is the President and Managing Consultant of CastlePointe, a management consulting firm specializing in leading IT transformation efforts. Since founding CastlePointe in 1997, he and his team have lead numerous IT transformation projects and has worked with clients including Avery Dennison, Westfield, Capital Group, Metropolitan Water District and Fidelity National. He has over 20 years of experience in IT operational management, project execution and strategic planning in the healthcare, financial, aerospace and entertainment industries. He is a columnist at the website ITSM Portal and frequently speaks and writes on the topics of organizational transformation and behavioral change.

About CastlePointe

Headquartered in Newport Beach, CA, CastlePointe is a premier provider of strategic IT consulting services to Fortune 2000 firms. Uniquely focused on leading its clients through successful IT transformation initiatives, CastlePointe operates nationally from offices in California, New Jersey and Tennessee. Using its proprietary DeepRoots™ methodology, we help large IT organizations reduce costs, improve service levels, drive efficiency and build operational scalability. To learn more about CastlePointe, visit it at www.castlepointe.com.