The Performance Change Planner Handbook, Part 2

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This is part two of a two-part piece. Part one can be found here. *[1]* [1]

Consider how your environment influences your habits and behaviors. Do not doubt that it does. Consider the messages on the walls; the noise and lighting levels; proximity to systems, equipment and people; and interactions between groups. Also, understand that environment is as much to do with other behaviors as ambiance, which takes us back to modeling behavior.

When was the last time that you worked up a plan that included all of those elements and was directed at influencing behavior, not just organizations? The lack of planning around behavior is a great reason why so many change initiatives fail.

If you incorporate the above elements into your change initiative plans, your chances of success greatly improve. I have experienced it and planned it. It makes a huge difference.

Let me also offer a framework for planning the progress of your behavioral change. We don’t change our habits all at once and we don’t change them instantaneously. I’ve said many times, change is a process, not an event. Here is a framework for planning the change process.

Imagine a matrix. Draw it on a piece of paper as you read this description. Plan your change in four to five phases. The first is the current state. The last is the ideal

state. Between those, select at least two other states, three is also good. I've used "beginning, improving, succeeding" before.

List the phases down one side of your matrix. I like to go from current state at the bottom to world-class at the top, but you can do what makes sense for you. Now, for each state, identify the behaviors, metrics and programs that represent your path to behavioral and performance change. These become the columns across the top of the matrix. We all know that no business operates without timelines, so add one last column for target "level-up" dates, but please don't make this column the biggest priority.

With the matrix constructed, we can fill it out. The current state is easy if you are good at being honest about how things are. List today's behaviors in the box for current-state behaviors. Then list your current metrics and programs. Put today's date in the last column.

The next few rows are a little more difficult. The ideal state row should be the easiest if you already spent your planning time addressing the elements listed above. List the ideal behaviors. For metrics, this is very important, answer how you will know that the behaviors are taking place. That's right, don't measure for results, measure for behaviors. It takes some creativity.

Here is an example metric for behavior. The behavior fits in a continuous improvement theme, and says that engineers will identify, propose and lead improvement projects and initiatives to improve engineering and related processes. The metric is simply a number of improvement projects proposed per engineer and by all engineers collectively. You see how the metric measures the behavior? There may be different target levels for the beginning level than the improving level than the succeeding level of the matrix.

With the behaviors and metrics identified, articulate the programs that are necessary to enable, drive or affect the behaviors. For example, if engineers are expected to identify and lead process improvement projects, they might need a training and mentoring program to enable that behavior.

Keep the plan comprehensive, but simple. If you can't fit the matrix on a single sheet of paper and read it, it's too complicated. An 11- by 17-inch sheet of paper is OK if it is a really big change. (Yes, I live and work in the U.S. — as my paper size reveals.)

With the change process framework in place, monitor it carefully. Make regular reports to leaders, peers and personnel concerning progress. It may be that your initial expectations for pace or metric targets were unrealistic, and reality may call for some adjustment to the plan. However, don't allow challenge to give excuses for "dumbing-down" your plan either.

Your organization gets to "level-up" to the next line on the matrix when the behavior metrics are satisfied. If you get to the succeeding level, and can stay there for two business quarters or more without losing ground, you can discuss future

plans for either becoming world-class and achieving the final ideal-state level, or adding another initiative for the next improvement focus.

Frankly, don't stop until you know you are indeed world-class. Absolutely, don't stop the pressure to change until you have at least stabilized at your succeeding level of performance. If you lose momentum any time before that, the change will likely ultimately fail. Your organization will relapse and revert to old ways.

If you think that your organization can change its ways in a single year, you either lead a very small and intimate organization, and have a great deal of interpersonal leadership over it, or you are in need of a reality check. For a large organization with multiple sites, and a complicated or diversified culture, it will take years; think three to five years to fully change habits and behaviors.

That's about as much advice as I can fit in a single post. Let me sum up. To accomplish genuine performance change, we must accomplish behavioral change. Changing our organization and directives isn't enough. We must plan the behavioral shift.

Consider the list of seven elements above (and in part one of this blog) when planning the behaviors and the shift. Understand that change is a process, not an event. Plan around a long process of change. Build a matrix of different phases of change with corresponding behaviors, measures of those behaviors and enabling programs. Track your progress and keep up the pressure. It can take years to effectively change an organization's ways of making decisions, responding to pressure or focus.

Plan carefully and focus on the behaviors. The behaviors are the key to change.

Stay wise, friends.

What's your take? Please feel free to leave a comment below. To read part one of this two-part series, please click here. *[1] For more information, please visit www.bizwizwithin.com* [2].

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