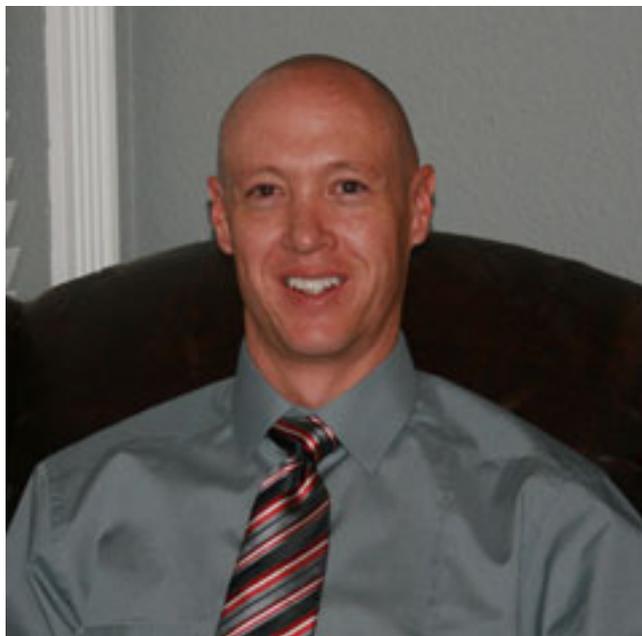


I'm Doing This You're Coming with Me, Part 1



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Accepting the axiom that business and process improvement is fundamentally an outcome of changed behavior, we must address how to lead a change in behavior.

If you follow my posts, then you have come to expect me to assert, repeatedly, that behavioral change is the key to successful performance improvement. I believe it firmly, and I'm willing and prepared to debate it. However, I find that most everyone accepts the assertion that has given the topic any thought or who has significant experience.

So, if the key is to change behavior, we must address the people with the behaviors. To address people, we must discuss leadership. Leadership is a critical element to any successful plan or enterprise designed to accomplish a major change.

We have at our disposal a great many resources giving advice about leadership. I'll not argue or rehash those bits of wisdom here. Instead, let's just briefly consider how to incorporate a leadership element into our plan for executing a significant change.

In my experience with driving performance change, behavioral change, and business cultural change or development, there is one strategy that overwhelmingly defines the difference between success and failure. That strategy is to start the change with the leaders.

When I say, "leaders," I don't just mean people in leadership positions or managers. I mean those people inside your organization to whom others go for advice and

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guidance. They may be lead engineers, seasoned buyers, charismatic salesmen, or the wide-eyed, fresh college graduate with energy that inspires.

When we can incorporate those leaders into our plans for change, we set our plans with a greater probability of success. If we allow those leaders to become part of the resistance (there is always resistance) we doom ourselves to aggravation and probable failure. In the latter case, it becomes a battle of wills and our own character and influence must be greater than our opposition's if we are to win the contest.

Why would we choose to battle against those established and trusted leadership elements when we can recruit them? Obviously, we shouldn't.

I'm not advising some form of manipulation. We have a change to drive, and we must include everyone because, ultimately, our organization must accept the behavioral change. I'm advising that we start the change with the leaders inside of our organization instead of trying to sway them later.

To succeed in leading the leaders, we must be a leader ourselves. We cannot expect those leaders to accept our change enterprise unless we demonstrate our own firm belief that it is the right and best thing to do, and our devotion to doing it. We must take an attitude of, "I'm doing this, and you're coming with me!"

To this attitude we will receive a wide range of reactions when we lay out our vision. We must lay out our vision in clear and repeatable terms. Our leaders must understand it, and also be able to pass it on.

Those few who will most directly benefit from the new way will hopefully accept and adopt the vision we lay out. If they do not, then it is usually because they need to understand the plan in greater detail to be given more confidence. In this case, lay out the plan that you have in mind and engage these leaders to improve upon it.

After all, they are leaders. We must ask them to lead, not to follow. We get their endorsement and their willing participation when we engage them to lead the improvement that will make life easier for them.

When we can explain or, better yet, demonstrate how the new way will be better, our open-minded enthusiasts get excited. These leaders, regardless of their experience level or position of authority, are very powerful agents of change. Show them how the new system works and empower them to exercise it with abandon.

These leaders will accomplish two things, and they will do it rapidly. First, they will be the first to independently succeed using the new method, system, or way we are driving. They will prove the success of our enterprise. Second, they will quickly root out the bugs or oversights in our plan without being discouraged.

Please tune into the Chemical Equipment Daily for part two of this two-part piece. What's your take? Please feel free to comment below!

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