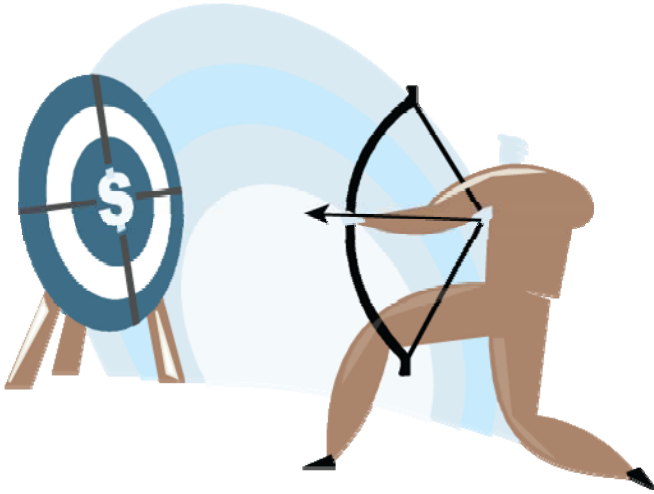


Handling Change



There are two ways for an owner/manager to understand change: as catch up or as strategy.

If you see change as the disagreeable cost of catching up to the competition, you are already behind. But if you see it as the facilitator of your corporate strategy, you are pulling away from the pack at the clubhouse turn and ready to open up in the back stretch. Recognition of change as a constant part of getting where you want to be five years from now will allow you to manage technology more effectively, develop a more flexible business model, run your business more efficiently, and produce a better bottom line.

Change is inevitable, but can be made a little easier if one pays attention to the following guidelines.

Have Clearly Defined Strategic Goals

What business do I want to be in five years from now? What will my business model be at that time? Since investment decisions, human resources planning, and technology choices are all driven by the strategic plan, make sure you have a clear idea of what you want to achieve.

Be Proactive

Leadership comes from the top – that’s you. Start the process, assign responsibilities and get going. Make sure your production and sales managers provide you with concise and timely information about quality control and customer satisfaction. Project progress will create an appetite for progress and permit changes to be made while ensuring the target is kept in sight.

Don’t Try to do it All Yourself

To go it alone is to set yourself up for failure. Not only will the project become bogged down while you stop to deal with operational matters, but, you will almost certainly lose heart and fall short of your strategic goals. Find people within the organization or hire consultants with the competencies you lack. The role of consultants is not to run your business but to provide a menu of solutions to specific problems and move the project forward. Whether the problem is a new

marketing campaign or a revamping of HR policies, management should involve people who solve problems as quickly as possible.

Recognize Change as a Constant

Solving today's problems with little regard for the future is a short-term view and creates the risk you may lose sight of your strategic goals. Businesses and their support systems are too complicated and expensive to be dealt with all at once. When embarking on change, document the specific areas in your business, such as administration/bookkeeping, HR, workshop/factory, or technology and develop a plan to review each on a cyclical basis knowing that upgrades will be required.

This approach will ensure that:

- All areas move forward;
- The interdependence of all sectors within the business is recognized;
- Employees know they are working for a common goal; and
- Investment and human resources requirements for the strategic plan will always be kept in sight.

Make Change User Friendly

Whether the change is as simple as starting to pay employees by direct deposit instead of by cheque or as complicated as setting up a new pricing system within inventory, never forget the end user. Failure to ensure seamless change will have an immediate negative impact on users who are naturally resistant to any change. Then, when the future dictates the need for additional change, resistance will increase.

Check Your Sources and Resources

Whether the change involves moving, hiring staff, purchasing new equipment or taking on new suppliers, make a due diligence investigation. Check references, visit sites that use the equipment, interview customers of the prospective new suppliers. These checks will help determine whether the job can be done and what ongoing support will be available if upgrades are needed or breakdowns occur.

Be Aggressive

Once change is decided upon it must be pushed aggressively. If timetables and expectations of management, staff, contractors, and suppliers are not supported with training programs; if testing is not scheduled; if dates and arrival times are not scheduled; chances are the enthusiasm for change will wane as people are struck half in the old and half in the new. The anxiety created will result in frustration and undoubtedly lead to decreased productivity.

Management's responsibility is to manage. When management takes charge of change with a clear purpose and a strong support team, change will be viewed as part of strategic business development and welcomed.