



We Help You Focus Clearly,
Organize Effectively,
And Act With Courage

May 2013

Leading “Old Dogs” in Change

What kind of leadership helps “old dogs” go beyond new tricks to create new realities?
Leadership that:

- Helps them see the big picture and clarify the need. One of my favorite reference points is the change formula coined by Richard Beckhard, an organizational development pioneer – “DxVxF>R”:
 - “D”=Dissatisfaction with today
 - “V”=Vision for the future
 - “F”=First Steps to get there

The greater the shared understanding of D, V, and F, the greater the potential for overcoming “R,” or resistance to change. If D, V, or F is low or missing however, resistance will be difficult to overcome.

- Listens intently to what they have to say and invites them to help in developing the solution.
- Does not discount what they already do well, but helps them build on that foundation. “Old dogs” have pride in their work, and a challenge to how they do things may be construed as a challenge to their pride.
- “Shows” them versus “tells” them what the new reality will look like.
- Provides plenty of time to learn new skills and practice in a supportive environment.

The reality is that all of the above can apply to “new dogs” as well, so the bottom line is that what “old dogs” need from their leaders in terms of change is simply... good leadership – one that provides clarity, support, and a constructive and appreciative approach.

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Old Dogs: Beyond New Tricks

By Cathy Perme

There is an old saying that “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” As an “old dog” myself, I beg to differ. I have seen “old dogs” not only learn “new tricks,” but *transform* those tricks into a new reality that is more productive, more effective, more creative, and more enjoyable in which to work.

“Old dogs” are not so much defined by age as by mastery level. Malcolm Gladwell, in his book *Outliers*, said that “10,000 hours of practice is required to achieve the level of mastery associated with being a world-class expert—in anything.” Therefore if a person spends 10,000 hours working in a specific area or job (akin to about 20 hours per week for 10 years) they have probably achieved a certain level of mastery in that area.

As a result, “old dogs” have figured out how to employ their skills effectively and efficiently based on what is under their control. And that is the rub! So much of life and work are not controllable, and achieving mastery in any specific area can provide a false sense of security. When the job or environment changes, however, “old dogs” may be forced to learn new skills that challenge their sense of mastery.

But when “old dogs” can see the big picture and be involved in adapting their skills to a new reality, they can literally transform it AND themselves in the process. A great example of this is the Facilities Maintenance Department of St. Paul Public Schools, with which we worked last year to help transform their processes.

- Staffed by 56 skilled tradespeople in 11 different trades and represented by 14 different unions, this department was under the gun to improve their productivity and reduce their backlog of repairs for an aging infrastructure.
- A time study showed that almost half their time was spent in “white space” -- i.e. unproductive time spent deciphering paperwork, locating information, and chasing down parts.
- Despite their alleged “fat fingers,” these folks embraced a new software technology system that streamlined internal processes and improved communications with customers and each other. It will also give them real-time access to inventory and project information so that they can actually *fix* things, not just *plan* to fix them.
- In the process of learning these new tricks, not only did they reduce their “white space,” they established a new culture of teamwork, transparency, and customer service that had been missing in the past because of process limitations.

Intensive listening (see side bar) was key to helping these “old dogs” be engaged. **More than half of the tradespeople were involved in shaping new systems and processes. In doing so, they honored their own mastery and built a strong foundation for the future.**

If you are interested in learning how we can help you get all of your “dogs” (new and old!) pulling together at top speed, please call. Instead of arguments you might find that you get a workplace that is more productive, more effective, more creative, and more enjoyable! ☐

Many thanks to Associates Jim Tennesen and Jerry Ammann for teaming with me on this project--two “old dogs” I’ve had the pleasure to work with for many years!