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



May, 1994 - Volume 3, Issue 4

### **Tips for Steering through Chaos**

- ✓ Realize that you can't control what's going on. You *can*, however, have *influence* if you find patterns so that you can impact communication, *and* if you create safety so that people can say what they really think.
- ✓ Create *new* networks by establishing key work groups that are deliberately composed of representatives from various formal and informal networks within your organization. Then put them to work on an important problem.
- ✓ Remember that change happens in stages. Watch for patterns to emerge, interpret them as best you can, talk with folks about your interpretations, and try again.
- ✓ Formal training can be helpful if
  - it's provided through existing networks that cross over sections of your organization,
  - training is focused around a problem to be solved,
  - terms and processes are consistent.
- ✓ Manage boundaries by constantly
  - clarifying purpose vs. wants,
  - clarifying organizational responsibilities,
  - re-articulating values and giving concrete examples of values in action.
- ✓ Take time to celebrate not only the end of a project, but the major milestones as well. It's a great way to remind yourself that progress is occurring and that you can never thank your co-workers enough for a job well done! ☐

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## **Leading Your Organization Through Chaos**

*Leading a complex organization through rapid change can seem like an overwhelming task. Here's how one leader applied principles of chaos theory to steer her organization through rough and turbulent times:*

### **Identify and create networks.**

Most organizations have pre-existing groups or networks where information often travels the fastest and with the most frequency. These groups can be formal or informal, based on friendships, work, interests or past working relationships. While you never know all the networks, knowledge of some of them can help you maximize communication links.

### **Locate patterns within your organization.**

Look for patterns of response by customers, staff, and the networks. While you will not always be able to discern *why* variations exist or to control any individual's or group's reaction, you may be able to anticipate a group's response to a future event within a certain set of responses. Simply put, know your audience and the activities they undertake.

### **Be consistent in your messages.**

Select one or two key topics each month that you consistently discuss with each group or network with which you come in contact. Over time, if you are making use of all your networks, people will have a clearer idea of what's important to you. And by increasing the number of channels where a topic is discussed, you may begin to influence what's important to others as well.

### **Clarify new boundaries as old ones are dismantled.**

People need boundaries to help focus their energy. So as you dismantle old boundaries around status, hierarchy, and/or jobs, communicate where there are new boundaries. Otherwise people may unconsciously use differences such as gender, race, age, etc. to re-orient themselves. You may need to create *temporary* structures until a clearer picture of the new organization emerges.

### **Create safety and trust by disclosing yourself first.**

As you do the above, you will notice how your messages take root and the feedback will begin to affect you personally. If you disclose your thoughts and feelings especially when you feel vulnerable or *don't* have all the answers, it helps to create an environment where others can take a risk to discuss what's on their minds too. It's at this point that real dialogue occurs and transformation begins. As you and others start to disclose what's important to you, you become able to determine right action together, because you will create a basic agreement about how to affect the direction of change.

*This newsletter was co-authored by Kim Rezek, Director of Vocational Rehabilitation for the MN Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), and Cathy Perme. DRS was thrown into chaos in late 1991 when regulation changes and a lawsuit required that it change the way it did business.*