Managing morale in times of change

A Triiibes discussion led by Ed Brenegar

triiibes.com

inspire   illuminate   innovate

Edited by Caroline Langdell

Contents:

What is Triiibes?

Triiibes, is an online social network created by Seth Godin for readers of his New York Times bestselling book *Tribes: We Need You To Lead Us*.

This is a tribe about tribes.

As Seth explains "The opportunity, particularly in a controlled, private group like this one, is to combine the leverage of digital with the one to one impact of real life. Basically, you get what you give."

Like any other online social network, the interaction between people is done through blog posts, discussion forums, the sharing of pictures and videos, and through messages sent between on members. Presently, over 6500 people are Triiibes members. You can find the main page of Triiibes at http://www.triiibes.com/ .

Introduction by Ed Brenegar

Some issues touch a nerve, sparking an immediate and passionate response. Such is the issue of morale in the workplace.

In preparation for a client's webinar, a survey was given to the participants asking them about issues they would like to address related to the subject of "Managing change, in an unknown future." A number of workplace issues were suggested. One of the most frequently mentioned was the issue of morale.

To better prepare me for the webinar, I posted a discussion question at the Triiibes social network. My expectation was to get a couple of ideas that would help me think more practically about morale. Little did I know that the discussion that followed would be of such depth of insight that one of the contributors suggested that an e-book be prepared and shared with others.

Managing Morale in a time of change is an edited version of our Triiibes discussion. The discussion took place over 12 days during July 2009. Over 130 posts were made by 36 different people. Each person's contribution brought value and insight to a topic that was important to everyone.

As the instigator of this discussion, I want to thank Richard Merrick for the suggestion of producing this e-book and Caroline Langdell for writing the summary and assisting in the editing and creation of this record of our discussion. I want to thank each of the Triiibes contributors, to Seth Godin for his support and advice, and to my friend and client, Virgil, who provided the opportunity for this discussion to have a real world context that mattered.

This discussion about morale in the workplace is not finished. It has only begun, and needs to not remain in one place, but be held in many places. Speaking for all those who contributed to this project, we encourage you to share *Managing Morale in a time of change* with friends and colleagues.

Since participation in the Triiibes network is by invitation only, you can respond with your comments and questions to http://edbrenegar.typepad.com/leading_questions/2009/08/managing-morale-in-a-time-of-change-a-triiibes-ebook.html .

Thank you for reading and sharing in our discussion.

Ed Brenegar

Executive Summary

In times of continuous and disruptive change, when cuts in staff and consolidation of operations mean the work context is changing dramatically, leaders face a huge challenge – how to maintain the morale of those who are left? Following is a summary of the thought streams from our discussion on Triiibes about how to tackle that challenge and the issues that surround it. An edited version of the discussion begins on Pg 14.

<div style="background-color:#c0504d; color:white; text-align:center; font-style:italic;">Morale</div>

What is morale?

The dictionary defines morale as the emotional condition of an individual with respect to cheerfulness, confidence and zeal etc. Most commonly talked about when facing times of opposition or hardship it makes sense that it would become an issue within a workforce whose organisation is undergoing huge change.

Many people within the discussion raised the idea that morale is an outcome, an emotional response to the context of the situation the individual finds themselves in. For some it was directly related to receiving a pay check and being able to take care of their family but for the majority it revolved around a complicated interplay of a huge range of factors including self confidence and direction.

Why is it important?

It appears organizations can no longer rely on traditional structures and hierarchies to get them through the troubles ahead. Those who are open to new ideas, who can rely on their workforce to pull together for a common purpose, are the ones who are more likely to pull through.

If an employee's morale is based upon receiving a pay check and their pay is cut or they're laid off, their motivation and confidence will be directly affected and they are likely to look elsewhere for the security and stability they crave.

However, if a person's morale is taken to be based upon a deeper personal meaning, if they see a connection between who they are and what they do, the possibilities for both the individual and the organisation are much broader. Challenges are more likely to be faced with an open mind and a positive attitude, they will want to find a way through rather than give up.

What can affect it?

Traditionally change itself affected morale. Caught in a cycle of looking for security and stability any change was seen as a major threat. Now change is accepted as part of life and business, it is the way in which we deal with it that appears to be most important.

It's clear that changes such as lay offs and pay cuts are painful. They affect not just those who are directly involved but those around them – workmates and colleagues. Not knowing what is happening or why can lead to fear and distrust and it is that which can be the most damaging. Employees are left thinking if it can happen to them it can happen to me, whose next or more worryingly, what's the point in trying.

Whose responsibility is it?

If morale is a personal, emotional response it would make sense that the ability to manage it lies with the individual. Having the self confidence to take control of your own situation is a sure sign of high morale while letting others dictate what happens to you is a sign of low morale.

However, in times of change and crises it is easy for that self confidence to be affected and that it seems, is where leaders still have a role to play. Instead of managing processes it is suggested that leaders grasp the opportunity to develop and empower their workforce.

It is not about strategic plans and empty promises but enabling the individual to understand the situation, how they can contribute and allowing them to take the initiative. The idea being that by understanding the levels of personal accountability and responsibility involved they would be able to look inward for morale and motivation – to find that connection between who they are and what they can do.

How to achieve that throws up many questions. Every situation is different so there is no "one size fits all" answer but the discussion highlighted some main themes:

Honesty- Tell the truth, let them know what's happening, if the situation is bad tell them so. If you lie to try and retain some sort of control you may loose the trust that is so important in creating productive relationships and developing loyalty.

Openness- It's not just the what, but the why. By helping people to understand why the situation is as it is they are better equipped to help you find a way through it. By engaging them in this way you clear the way for new ideas and skills to develop.

Personal development-By helping those you lead to understand their role and develop their own initiative you enable them to have more control over their own future. It can help people feel valued and increase

their confidence. Help them to stop seeing change as the death of what they know and start to see it as an avenue for new opportunities.

The downside - it can reduce employee dependence on the business but that's fine – it helps to ensure the ones that work for you want and chose to be there rather than hanging on because it's the safe thing to do.

Triiibal experience

As you would expect there is much more information contained within the discussion than is covered in this summary including the personal experiences of some of our contributors. Those stories give us first hand information of how people deal with this situation and what they have learnt and include:

- David F Pu'u who during mentoring a troubled teen found was amazed at how giving someone the tools and encouragement to change can have such a profound effect.

- Jodi Kaplan who having been on the receiving end of a bad leader thinks honesty and transparency are the order of the day.

- Shawn McCormick who when he was the leader of an organisation that went through 13 rounds of layoffs identified three main stages of the process – Pre Layoff, Layoff and Rebuilding.

- DennisS who explains his own personal experience of being laid off, the consequences and what he learnt as a result.

- Conor Kenny, who from his own experiences created a 33 point list of things to consider.

- Ricardo a Gonzales who talks about transformation and the idea of successive approximation as well as the field of emotional intelligence.

Open Questions

- There are a number of references to morale as "emergent" and the outcome of the interplay of expectations of organization and individual. With a rapid rebalancing of power in many areas between business and individual (in practice, the reducing "command and control" power of the organization), what might be the long term implications of this?

- There are a number of references to the latent potential and needs of individuals, from the talents resident in "multiple intelligences" to the opportunities and constraints resulting from our understanding of "emotional intelligence". How will these affect the balance between organization and individual, and their respective expectations?

- With social media enabling the development and growth of Tribes, how will this affect the role of Organizations?

- If Morale is an outcome, is it possible to effectively manage it reactively?

- Is Morale an organizational, or individual responsibility?

Reading List

During the discussion a variety of books, websites and other sources were recommended. Here's a full list.

Books

- Presence, Peter Senge

- Leadership and Self Deception, The Arbinger Institute

- Speed of Trust, Stephen Covey

- The Inclusion Breakthrough, Fred Miller and Judith Katz

- Managing Transitions: Making the most of Change, William Bridges

- Art of Happiness at Work, H Dalai Lama and Howard Cutler

- The Anatomy of Peace, The Arbinger Institute

- The Will to Lead, Marvin Bower

- Who moved my Cheese?, Spencer Johnson and Kenneth Blanchard

- Career Renegade, Jonathan Fields

- The Answer to How is Yes, Peter Block

- [The Dip, Seth Godin](#)

- [The Responsibility Virus, Roger Martin](#)

- [Outliers: The Story of Success, Malcolm Gladwell](#)

- [Upbeat, Rajesh Setty](#)

- [Tactical Transparency, Sel Holtz and John C Havens](#)

- [In Pursuit of Elegance, Matthew E May](#)

- [Flow, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi](#)

- [The Element, Ken Robinson](#)

- [Warren Bennis](#), [John Gardner](#) and [Ron Heifetz](#) were also highlighted as authors to look out for.

Websites/Blogs

- www.change-management-toolbook.com

- Jack Welch's Blog Entry: When to talk, when to balk

  http://www.welchway.com/About-You/Leaders/Being-a-Leader/When-to-Talk,-When-to-Balk.aspx

Other items linked to within the document

- Anne McCrossan's Manifesto

- Slideshow from ReBoot Britain

- Motivation in a down turning economy, Meredith Elliott Powell.

- Ed Brenegar's two leadership matrixes

Main Discussion: Managing Morale in a time of change

A Triiibes Discussion Posted by Ed Brenegar on July 7, 2009

I'm interested in Triiibesters' thoughts about the issue of employee morale in the context of continuous, disruptive change. The situation I'm addressing is one where cuts in staff and consolidation of operations have dramatically changed the work context.

My specific questions are:

1. What is your recommendation to an organizational leader for maintaining morale of his/her people who find that their "plate" of responsibilities is growing as the company reduces costs through layoffs and consolidation?

2. Other than Seth's Tribes, are their books that you'd recommend that address the issue of morale?

Thanks for your contributions.

Reply by **Stephen Q Shannon**

In a blink having been there and either done that or facilitated what you are describing my first question within which you will identify a strong recommendation reads,"Has the leader of the organization in complete candor (the truth) told the survivors there will not be any more layoffs, right sizing, cuts, terminations, and Reduction In Force (RIFs)?" Book or books to follow.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

The leaders can't say that. So, the challenge is to build morale when there is no security. How's that for an impossible situation?

Reply by **Meridith Elliott Powell**

Hey Ed!

My thoughts - the truth is I do not think that is an impossible situation.. It is life - lack of security and we should be taught to embrace it rather than fight it..

.. There is never security - and for some reason we are taught - from a social perspective that there is… What great leaders (employers, parents, teachers etc..) do is inspire people and help them learn

the skills that build confidence. Confidence builds self reliance.. And with self reliance comes the attitude and the strength to not only survive tough times - but to seize opportunity in good times.

I think so much of our society is caught in this cycle of looking for security- or staying in places that are secure.. And that breeds mediocrity. And from a leadership (again parent, employer, teacher etc) I think it is cruel to give people the sense they are secure vs. the skills they need to set their own destiny.

We were hiking a few years ago in Eastern Europe - near the Tatras.. and we were in and out of small towns - and to see the older people in those small towns was quite sad.. They had been raised under communism - and then all of a sudden (okay years, and years) things changed.. They were 60 years old with no confidence or belief they could take care of themselves… their lives became poverty and struggle - Vs. the younger twenty somethings.. They were on fire - excited, studying learning, working two and three jobs.. They smelled opportunity (not tough times) and were ready to seize it..

To build morale.. Give people the skills and talents they need to be successful .. Regardless of what happens in this world.. Put people in control of their own lives and watch their energy level explode!!

Reply by **David F. Pu'u**

"To build morale.. Give people the skills and talents they need to be successful .. Regardless of what happens in this world.. Put people in control of their own lives and watch their energy level explode!!"

I think Meredith has hit on a primary course of action that will work in a large percentage of cases.

There was a young man in our community who was sort of a ne'er do well. I wound up connecting with him, we laid some ground rules in order to establish accountability. I utilized some meager company resources and personally mentored him for a year. He went from being involved in the seamier aspects of teen life to being one of the most successful athletes in his sport in US history within one year.

I watched quietly last year as he had his first child. Married, happy, seemingly still engaged in positive forward momentum. The change to his morale was something that always struck me.

He was given the tools, encouraged and from an obvious despair (Heroin addicted Mother, dead Father) came great hope, which he follows to this day.

Positive re enforcement. You can see the obvious tenets involved here so won't bore you with

The detailed analysis, but for my company and myself personally, the investment in managing this persons morale via the process Meredith describes, created something rather spectacular.

 Reply by **Wilma Ham**

I enjoyed the book 'Presence' by Peter Senge and co writers. It brings home that leaders of large organizations cannot tell the truth and hence lose their ability to lead. Morale is about being honest AND trusting that honesty and transparency will bring out the best in people.

People are not stupid and they normally are great when they actually know there is a crisis. However if everybody pussy foots around, how can you expect them to be their best and accept a fuller plate.

They just think and know that is another ploy to make the shareholders richer and them more tired and not without reason.

It is the same with children, walk your talk and be transparent, look after them as best as you can and they are a contribution. For me it is common sense really. The 'Presence' book is really good for that.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Thanks for the recommendation. I'm a Senge fan, but haven't read this one. I'll add it to the list.

Reply by **Chris Landry**

Ed, it's off topic here, but that book hanged the path of my life. I'll tell you about it some time.

What's relevant here, and it's great that Wilma brought it up, is that it's a book about opening our hearts as well as our minds to something larger than ourselves. The way it's written is irritating to some, because it's like a long, rambling conversation, but there's some gold in it.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

I'm glad to know, and even more motivated to read it. My "to read" list is growing exponentially. So many books, so little time.

Thanks.

Reply by **Becky Blanton**

Be honest. Let the workers know what they already know - that no one can guarantee them anything. Just saying it takes the fear out of it. Admit it. Promise to be honest and to let them know about changes as soon as the leaders can. Find a way to promise them hope if they are laid off - for instance, "We'll give everyone X amount of severance, you'll have x weeks of unemployment and excellent reference letters if we are forced to lay you off. We don't want to make any cuts but don't know right now what is coming. We need you. We value you. We hope you will stay with us and ride this out as long as possible. We'll understand if you want to look for work elsewhere, but we hope you'll take a chance with us.

Now, what can we do to make this hard time less scary?"

I think if you turn to the workers, trust them to be honest, to communicate, to contribute and suggest solutions - you'll find most want to be loyal. They fear not being valued or being kicked to the curb. It's amazing how honesty, vulnerability and openness - real honesty, works.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Totally agree. Honesty is tough because you first have to be honest with yourself as a leader. The best thing I've read on this is Leadership and Self Deception by The Arbinger Institute.

Reply by **Kayla Lamoreaux**

One of my favorite all time books - I also love their Anatomy of Peace. Seriously life changing.

Reply by **Mike Boyer Smith**

People follow leaders because the leader gives them a believable vision of a better future. Included in that vision is the path to that future.

Think Winston Churchill and the Blitz.

I think that group morale is held by keeping everyone focused what's on *the other side* of the difficulty, and ensuring they accept the realities of the moment as part of the price that must be paid for that better future. It's reality that not everyone will experience that future.

We will fight them in the fields... Never, never, never, give up....etc (more Churchill)

If the leader himself gets hung up on the difficult realities of the moment and can't sustain the vision, then he is not a real leader.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Churchill is perfect. Here's audio of the June 4, 1940 speech.

Reply by **Richard Merrick**

My own favourite is Col Tim Collins on the eve of going into Iraq. No matter how flawed we may believe the decision to have been, this is one of the best leaders speeches I have ever seen. Forgive me quoting it in full - I think it's worth it.

We go to liberate not to conquer. We will not fly our flags in their country. We are entering Iraq to free a people and the only flag which will be flown in that ancient land is their own. Show respect for them.

There are some who are alive at this moment who will not be alive shortly. Those who do not wish to go on that journey, we will not send. As for the others I expect you to rock their world. Wipe them out if that is what they choose. But if you are ferocious in battle remember to be magnanimous in victory.

Iraq is steeped in history. It is the site of the Garden of Eden, of the Great Flood and the birthplace of Abraham. Tread lightly there. You will see things that no man could pay to see and you will have to go a long way to find a more decent, generous and upright people than the Iraqis. You will be embarrassed by their hospitality even though they have nothing. Don't treat them as refugees for they are in their own country. Their children will be poor, in years to come they will know that the light of liberation in their lives was brought by you.

If there are casualties of war then remember that when they woke up and got dressed in the morning they did not plan to die this day. Allow them dignity in death. Bury them properly and mark their graves.

It is my foremost intention to bring every single one of you out alive but there may be people among us who will not see the end of this campaign. We will put them in their sleeping bags and send them back. There will be no time for sorrow.

The enemy should be in no doubt that we are his nemesis and that we are bringing about his rightful destruction. There are many regional commanders who have stains on their souls and they are stoking the fires of hell for Saddam. He and his forces will be destroyed by this coalition for what they have done. As they die they will know their deeds have brought them to this place. Show them no pity.

It is a big step to take another human life. It is not to be done lightly. I know of men who have taken life needlessly in other conflicts, I can assure you they live with the Mark of Cain upon them. If someone surrenders to you then remember they have that right in international law and ensure that one day they go home to their family.

The ones who wish to fight, well, we aim to please.

If you harm the regiment or its history by over-enthusiasm in killing or in cowardice, know it is your family who will suffer. You will be shunned unless your conduct is of the highest for your deeds will follow you down through history. We will bring shame on neither our uniform or our nation.

[Regarding the use by Saddam of chemical or biological weapons] It is not a question of if, it's a question of when. We know he has already devolved the decision to lower commanders, and that means he has already taken the decision himself. If we survive the first strike we will survive the attack.

As for ourselves, let's bring everyone home and leave Iraq a better place for us having been there.

Our business now is north.

 Reply by **David F. Pu'u**

Richard,

This was a remarkable read for me, as one of my friends was first in with USMC 1st Recon. (He just left again BTW). The account really outlines a complex and vital mix of leadership tenets. I thoroughly appreciated the view it affords. Thanks for applying it to this subject.

Reply by **Richard Merrick**

Hello Ed

Great question. As someone who is in the middle of this. both as a business owner and as a coach to those in the midst of it, I think it comes down to one critical issue. Change is a continuum, not a periodic event, and the real morale issue comes down to self confidence and trust. We are past the point where anyone can take responsibility for the impact of change on someone else's life, and the reality is that this is as true of organisational evolution as it is of climate change. I think the morale problem occurs when people think change is being "done to them", and feel victimised. I think our greatest contribution as leaders is to make this point constructively and compassionately, and ensure that we emphasise the need for personal development as a continuous process, regardless of business need or relative rank. In short, we cannot manage change, only organise for business and individual resilience in the face of it. The downside is that doing this reduces employee dependence on the business, and therefore control - but that is a small price to pay (in my opinion) and should ensure our employees want and choose to be with us rather than feel they have to hang on in there out of fear of the outside World. This post is getting far too long, but I hope the point is clear. Self confidence as individuals, trust in the intent of those we work with and for.

No book recommendations (I lose patience with "how to" books that are written as cure-alls - the answer lies within us), but some useful stuff on http://www.change-management-toolbook.com/

Cheers

Reply by **Feargus Callagy**

Not messing here but reward people who are being proactive about the situation and can justify their position. Lollipops for the best ideas are a great if unusual one. I once gave out 5 lollipops to grown adults during a difficult stock take in a previous company. I was secretly delighted but amazed when one grown adult asked to see me in the office and asked why he did not get a lollipop. He was told and understood and this reinforced the benefit to those that had received the lollipops. Cost me about 2 euro.

Reply by **Meridith Elliott Powell**

Ed,

I did a talk on this a few months ago - well technically it was how to motivate in a down turning economy.. and what it boiled down to was/is morale… here is what I put together based on research that I uncovered.. It boils down to helping people gain control (ensure they have say in what is going on) and make sure they understand how they contribute - why their job and role matters.. People want to make a difference.. and as a leader you can through your style and communication you can help them understand how they do!!

Here are my slides

Attachments: Master Crescent.ppt, 286 KB

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Thanks, Meridith. This is great material.

I love the first question "Where are We Going?" It reminds me of what I call the Great Unknowns.

When I was immersed in the Lewis & Clark, I created a [framework](#) that portrayed L&C as the first 21st century leadership team. The link is to two matrixes, one on Lewis & Clark, and another I call The Leaders Navigational Toolkit: Navigating the Unknown Territory of the Future

Here are the Great Unknowns.

Where am I going?

What will I achieve?

What do I need?

Am I ready?

Who will go with me?

Can I find partners?

Can I make it through?

What is the right thing to do?

Some day all this will make into a book.

Reply by **Bernd Nurnberger (CoCreatr)**

To me, morale is an outcome of being productive, delivering real value. Marvin Bower, *The Will to Lead* comes to mind.

Not spot-on, but may be helpful: Jack Welch's blog, [When to talk, when to balk](#).

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Thank each of you for your thoughtful comments.

My own thoughts have to do with the need for leaders to change the way they communicate and how they relate to the people who work for them. In essence, there is a need for more communication that is open, honest, transparent and is focused on the big picture, long view of the future that is disruptive and unknown. The relationship of the leader to others is to build confidence in each person's ability to do the job that they have to do, and to find a way to do it, regardless of how hard things get. I take my cue from the experience of geographic explorers who ventured into the unknown. More than anything, they are known for their character of being people of "resourceful optimism." In essence, the refused to quit, and continued to look for ways to succeed. I'm especially focused on the experience of [Lewis & Clark](#) in the US, [Shackleton](#) in the Antarctic, and [Cabezza de Vaca](#) who was lost on a voyage in Spanish Florida, and who was the sole survivor to make it to Spanish Mexico through what is today Texas and New Mexico. I'll write more about this at another time.

Thank you again for taking time to share your thoughts. It is very powerful stuff.

Reply by **Richard Merrick**

A couple more thoughts:

Dictionary definition of morale: emotional or mental condition with respect to cheerfulness, confidence, zeal, etc., esp. in the face of opposition, hardship, etc.: the morale of the troops.

…and of Trust: reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, surety, etc., of a person or thing; confidence.

I think in the end morale is a function of management leadership, integrity and intent, respect for all, and the trust it engenders. Good leaders come in all shapes, in all situations, but if there is a trust in them, morale will be high regardless of conditions.

You might want to have a look at the younger Covey's "Speed of Trust". I bought it (after a Triiibes recommendation) as an audio book, and found it thought provoking (if a little to much "how to").

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Thanks, Richard. Amazing how hard times thrust the importance of leadership character to the forefront. Thanks for the book recommendation.

Reply by **Joel D Canfield**

Second the recommendation—but this book will only help in an environment of absolute honesty. If the front-line managers really care about their people, those people will keep the right attitude.

Reply by **John Waire**

People HATE times like this….but they RESPECT honesty. Over the years I've found that people are more accepting of a given situation when they understand WHY it's happening. Decisions are often made and executed with little to no forethought of educating those that are truly impacted.

Honesty and adequate notice are essential. If at all possible….showing your hand and soliciting input is a great way of allowing all involved to see the challenges at hand. Sharing the situation goes a long way into creating buy-in with a solution and although the end-game may not be desirable….provides a pseudo sense of control in the decision.

ENGAGE. Leaders may find that those around them have some pretty insightful ways of helping.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Thanks, John. Totally agree with you. People hate this kind of change because it is painful. They see their friends and colleagues lose their jobs. It hurts. They wonder when they are next. It is one of the toughest things to face. All the more reason why leaders need to keep their head together by being forthright with people. It is very important.

Reply by **Bob Poole**

I'd recommend to the leader that he/she be a leader and not a manager looking for "something" that will help with morale. I believe that if a leader believes that morale or confidence needs to be restored, they will exhibit the necessary conviction to demonstrate their beliefs. By their words and actions they will lead their tribe/organization towards a shared vision.

Warren Bennis and John W. Gardner have great books on leadership.

I hope that wasn't too abrupt, Ed, but I'm running out of here in about two minutes for the rest of the day.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Not abrupt, just to the point. And one well taken.

Yes, Bennis and Gardner are great. So is Ron Heifetz.

Reply by **Ricardo A. Gonzalez**

When I got my first leadership assignment, my older brother (who had a few years of leadership experience over me) told me something that I never forgot and has proven itself over and over: "Don't lie to the people you lead. You can lose trust in an instant, and it can take a whole career to get it back." So, for me, the number one thing would be to set an honest table that everyone can sit at in good conscience. That starts the process of moving forward together. I hear that echoed in some of the other comments posted here, and it's reassuring to see that there are others who place a high value on the "straight story."

When senior leadership tells the workforce for years that they company is riding the storm, it's capital position is great, blah, blah, then suddenly switch gears and tell everyone that it's "all hands on deck" and "we're hurting"…well, how do you suppose that makes the workforce feel, junior leadership included? Nothing shakes morale like the feeling that you haven't been in on the truth. After that realization, why bother?

Two books that I keep falling back on. The first is called "The Inclusion Breakthrough" by Fred Miller and Judith Katz. It's a good book that explores and sets up the need for a truly inclusive workplace,

not just a "diverse" workplace that focuses on keeping the Affirmative Action stats in line. Of course, the authors have more to sell via The Kaleel Jamison Group (http://www.kjcg.com/), but that's a whole other conversation…

The other book is "Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change" by William Bridges (http://www.wmbridges.com/). Again, I am sure there is more to sell, but what I really like about this book is that fact that it is not a set-up for more products but a very practical, thoughtful book with actual "things to do" about what may be happening at any organization in the throws of change. The most powerful piece of the Bridges approach is the transition cycle he outlines. It's acknowledges that you can't bury the pain of losing what was in an effort to move forward. What was must be mourned, dealt with, and laid to rest before what can be ever has a chance of coming to life. Good stuff.

I'll throw a third book in the mix that speaks to the spiritual side of things: "The Art of Happiness at Work" by HH Dalai Lama and Howard Cutler. Having read their first collaboration, "The Art of Happiness," helps for background, but isn't necessary; the book does stand on its own. If the Dalai Lama isn't your cup of tea (or theirs), find some other equally woo-woo writer who aligns better. My point in bringing books like these up is simply that you cannot over-emphasize the need to touch and speak to the human soul in times like these.

So, I think there is a formula: expose the truth; speak the truth; invite everyone in the organization to the table; establish a common language and tool set; speak to the human beings in the room, not just the "human doings."

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

This is really great Ricardo. My whole approach to change is to treat it as a transition from one stage to the next. This is the image I use to demonstrate change. There are two points here. First, we know it is time to change when our performance plateaus or goes into decline. Second, we need to anticipate this change by stop doing some things and start doing some new things. Seth's book The Dip is a good treatment of this idea. So, I'm right with you on the notion of transition.
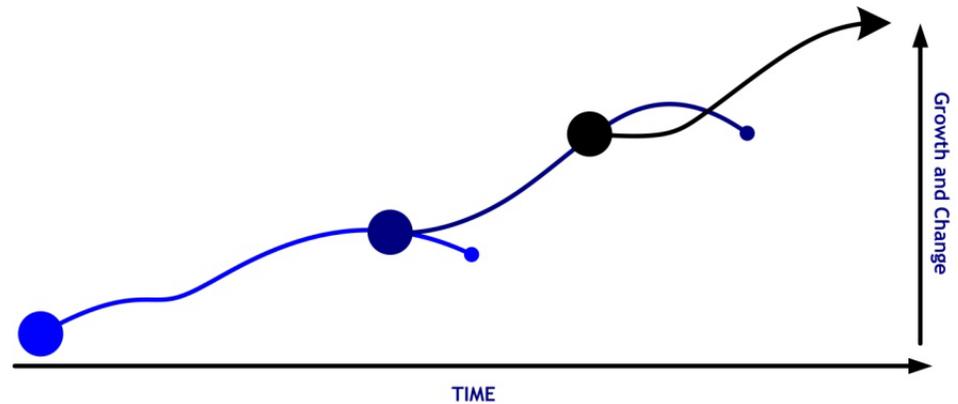
The challenge for many in large complex corporate structures is to see the future as something that is there's. Change is disruptive rather than a transition to the next level or era.

The book recommendations are great. It points to how personal the experience of change is, and how important our character as leaders really is.

Reply by **Ricardo A. Gonzalez**

I like how your visual illustrates change over time. That's important.

At one transformation session or another, I combined one of William Bridges' ideas with one of Fred Miller's, and it came out like this:

What it illustrates is this cycle of change, mourning, preparation, acceptance, and…more change. What it shows is that transformation (I originally called it "Evolution") begins with ideas.

• Ideas make up individual mindsets.

• Our mindsets determine our behaviors.

• Our behaviors result in a consistent level of performance.

• The consistency of our performance determines the sustainability of our system of beliefs.

• Our beliefs color our ideas.

• Our ideas inspire Transformation.

In essence, it is a process whereby thoughts and actions influence and reinforce one another. It's a self-validating system, particularly bullets two through six. If the system produces positive or at least acceptable results, a person may get into a rhythm. Depending on the individual and the culture in which they operate, the incentive to modify the system may be reduced. Why mess with success, right? And…voila…you have resistance to change.
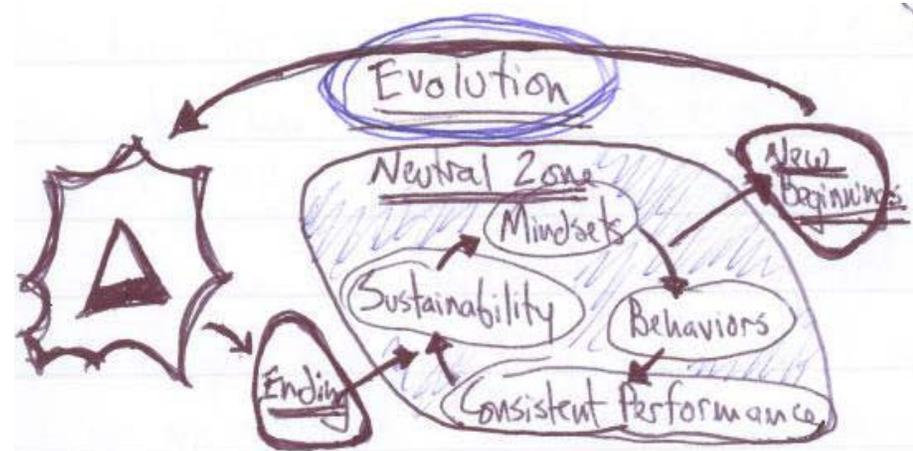
This system for transformation made me think about the concept of "successive approximation." I first heard about successive approximation when studying human language acquisition. In short, it's used to

explain how people encourage infants as they begin to learn language. We positively reinforce babble that more or less (or perhaps even vaguely) sounds like a specific word; "Mama" or "Papa," for example. With each successive attempt, we grow more and more excited as the child comes a little closer to producing the actual word we're teaching them. Eventually, we scream with glee when they finally get it "right." Successive approximation. The process continues on throughout life, from childhood to adulthood, from speech to behavior and beyond.

If we are willing to work with this idea of successive approximation, we can "reverse-engineer" it, and develop a mechanism whereby behavior can be modified, not just reinforced. We can leverage successive approximation to slowly begin positively reinforcing new behaviors that support the environment we hope to develop; an inclusive workplace, for example. If the incremental changes pay off for the individual, then validation occurs, and the likelihood of the behavior becoming more consistent increases. We all take another step in the same direction. Apply successive approximation to the transformation system I sketched, and you can see how influencing behavior can impact everything from performance to mindsets. You've just laid the groundwork for transformation!

Or something like that.

Reply by **Richard Merrick**

Hi Ricardo

I like this. I'm going to play with this in relation to some coaching models I'm working on (with attribution) - ok by you?

Richard

Reply by **Ricardo A. Gonzalez**

Run with it, Richard! I just put pieces from different places together into something that made sense to me. Evolve away!

Reply by **Chris Landry**

Ricardo, I loved The Art of Happiness but am amusing myself with the vision of HH Dalai Lama at work, perhaps working in a cubicle.

I love the formula you share here. Thank you.

Reply by **Ziona Etzion**

If Morale is connected to the paycheck and a person's ability to take care of his family…you are all so off the mark! (yaasotm!)

If morale is connected to explaining to one's bank manager why the income stream is reduces…yaasotm!

If morale as a breadwinner is telling the kids why the family has to sell there car….yaasotm!

If morale depends on paying a life coach to lift it up…yaasotm!

If moral depends on reading books…yaasotm!

In a time like this it is the actions one has the courage to take! The extra jobs!!! The ability to be persistent, be creative and keep on the move taking steps to keep one's chin up.

The leader's role is a listener but many a time his ability to increase the income of a person is minimal.

The leader should act as a facilitator and conduit of ideas and help a person find other supplementary means of income.

Only then is he truly of value to the people he is leading.

Reply by **Richard Merrick**

Sorry Ziona - it's about so much more than income in my view. It may be part, but far from all. Role of a leader in my book is to win the hearts and minds of others in pursuit of a common purpose. The rest is management yadda yadda.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Great points, Ziona.

What is happening is that when jobs are cut, those responsibilities are being given to the remaining people, and with no extra compensation. What is hard is that some people did not plan of advancing in the company this way. They didn't want to move from a #2 to a #1 position. Yet, that is what they have to do.

This is why the way we organize work within corporate structures has to change. It can't be imposed from the outside. It has to be created by the people who do it. In another project, to begin later this year, we are going to train supervisors and managers how to help their people resolve issues so that they don't become a crisis. In this sense, every leader is a facilitator of the leadership capacity of every person within their role in the company. This is the future and what will result in better companies after we get through this recession.

Reply by **Ricardo A. Gonzalez**

Ziona, your post is one of the best reality checks out there: for every touchy-feely person out there, there is another who simply wants to know what they need to do next. We all balance our energies, if you will, and you can't expect every person to react the same way. That being the case, income doesn't cut it for everyone. There are some people who value other things more and I don't use "value" in a judgmental way at all. It is simply a fact that we all have different motivators.

Where I work, there is an effort to transform our organizational culture. Unfortunately, the emphasis has been very touchy-feely, and that has missed the mark for those who tend to be more analytical and those who are more "type A," if you will. So, to your point, trying to cast as wide a net as possible is important. It also helps to use different bait if you want different types of fish.

I will out-n-out disagree with you on the idea that reading books is "off the mark." While I agree that actions, in the end, make all the difference, I believe that leaders who are not constantly exercising and challenging their leadership skill set are "sotm," to borrow your acronym! It's like any other part of our bodies or intellect: if unused, it atrophies. I have met many atrophied leaders who are all about action, and it tends to be the wrong kind of action.

 Reply by **Steven Devijver**

Hey Ed,

Thanks for this very interesting discussion. It is clear to me that morale is an outcome: it's the result of the complicated interplay between self, internal articulations, group dynamics, social status, external events, outlooks and forecasts, governing dynamics, relationships, social capital … In other words, morale is too complicated to calculate yet easy to discern.

Another consequence is that morale is emergent: it's the result of the interplay between positive and negative feedback loops within a larger system. Again, this fits with the view that morale is an outcome, an output in the form of attitude and disposition that is fed back into the system as input in various ways.

In order to get a better understanding of what morale is and how it is affected both positively and negatively here are a few observations:

- The only result anybody can expect from cutting costs is lower costs. Cutting costs is a negative feedback loop; it's an interruption, a deconstruction. It's the opposite of building or growing.
- Companies that have to cut back basically have to admit that previously their businesses were based on unsustainable assumptions about reality. This is a heavy blow for most people since this means the bottom drops from under their feet. This is a very important point to introspect on, ignore this one at your own risk.
- Given that our previous articulations about reality turned out to be nothing but fiction, how can we get back to sustainability and credibility? Can we trust management to figure this one out in isolation, or is it beneficial for morale to turn this exercise into a group effort, a group conversation or a group deliberation? (see my book)
- If we assume for a moment that morale is a function of personal meaning, then we know that personal meaning comes from relationships and relationships are built on mutual commitment. It's then not difficult to see that cutbacks, discontinuation, consolidation, are all forms that destroy commitment, that basically say: you'd be a fool to commit to anything these days. In other words: no commitment equals low morale.
- People are very good in detecting commitment in other people, and if very few people commit to each other it's very easy to copy that behavior. In other words: somebody will have to take a chance and publicly declare that success can only happen if we learn to trust each other.
- Trust can be built in two ways: by receiving attention, and by being transparent. In the case of attention, we trust people who care enough about us to pay attention to us. In the case of transparency, when in doubt we can inspect whatever we want at will.
- Morale is an outcome. In order to work on morale we need to work on those factors that improve moral. The 3 human universals are a good place to start.

My €.02

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

As usual, Steven, deep and comprehensive, worth printing off and reflecting on.

I agree that morale is an outcome. But is it an objective or simply a by-product of something else. I tend toward the latter.

Reply by **Steven Devijver**

Hey Ed,

Thanks for your kind words. It's certainly a by-product, it's hard to aim for. But an understanding of how morale works certainly helps.

Regarding other books, I can certainly recommend "The Responsibility Virus". Here's a good review of the book.

Steven

Reply by **Jodi Kaplan**

Having been on the receiving end of a "leader" who couldn't lead if he had a GPS with a big red line marking the way, I say that the most important things are honesty and transparency.

1) Tell the truth: be clear that the situation is bad, and explain what you're doing to get through it. People will pull together if they see a path through the crisis

2) Give small rewards where you can: free pizza Mondays, casual Fridays, flex-time, etc.

3) If there are layoffs, try to consolidate them (rather than spreading them out over a long period). One or two big layoffs are easier than 5 or 6 small ones

4) Share the pain with your employees (if you're the CEO, earning $750,000, while your employees make $25-$35K, take a pay cut)

5) Set aside your own ego. If a pet project is costing lots of money, but not getting results, cut it.

Oh, and feel free to post anything of mine in this thread that you find useful.

Reply by **Ujjwal Trivedi**

Great thoughts! Honesty builds trust and keeps people together. Small rewards keep the spirits up.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Share the pain with your employees. A profound suggestion no doubt. How many leaders are willing to suffer in order to show solidarity with those whose situations are more tenuous?

Reply by **Ujjwal Trivedi**

Now that many issues have already been discussed. I'd just focus on one - 'An empty mind is a devil's workshop...'

For 1. Nothing is more demoralizing than no-work. A leader should engage people in some productive work. If you are not getting work from outside (clients), one can encourage people to work on their own ideas. Create something. Learn something new or teach each other. Make them anti-recessionist.

For 2. Nothing comes to mind right now.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Wise words, Ujjwal. I've been there before where the bottom dropped out, and it was time to reinvent myself. I've found it a hard time, but also a great time of creativity.

Reply by Diane Aurit

I had my own thought ready to write, then read the comments below and found they have already been said! The number one focus should be on transparency, honestly and open communication. There is nothing more important than making everyone feel that they know what is happening and that they can trust their leaders to be honest with them. Not knowing and distrust result in fear which is the key contributor to bad morale. I was a part of a privately owned firm that was bought out by a large national corporation. About 90% of us left the company because we were so shocked and mistreated by the new owners. We had no buy-in with the changes and felt no connection to the new company. If the leadership had been honest with us, showed us respect, and not just tried to sell us on their excellence but listened to our concerns and made us a partner in the process I think more of us would have stayed. I know it is an elementary book, but Who Moved My Cheese is a simple book that might be appropriate.

Reply by Richard Merrick

Important point this Diane. I'm not sure how we reconcile the needs / expectations of remote financial only shareholders with the honest, transparency and intent need for trust. For my part, I found I couldn't reconcile it, so left a public company CEO position to do my own thing. Now smaller but very adequate income, totally different level of happiness, and a workforce who want to be here. No competition.

Reply by **Didier Daglinckx**

Diane, this looks like an experience I had some years ago …

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Cheese, the book, has had a huge impact upon people because it simple terms it describes an experience that everyone has experienced at some point in life.

In your experience, being able to take charge of your situation to begin again is a sure sign of the self-confidence that is at the root of high morale. That is the challenge in large corporate structures. How to give people a setting where their self-confidence can be nurtured as a business strength.

Reply by **Didier Daglinckx**

As a small biz entrepreneur, I don't have the same point of view but my personal experience would drive me to the following :

- Can I trust my leaders, boss, … ?

- What are they doing to change the situation ?

- How are they changing their own way of behaving in front of this ?

- Why would I work harder ?

- How will it be rewarded ?

- What are the perspectives ?

- Is there a possible future for our company ?

- What is my place in this future ?

- Do I have any part in changing the situation ?

- How are my co-workers reacting ?

… My 2 cents …

BTW, this kind of question is also surfacing when you see it from the client/contractor point of view.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Yes, this applies in all kinds of organizational relationships. Thanks for bringing a new dimension to this discussion.

Reply by **Shawn McCormick**

Great topic Ed. As a leader in a large company that went through 13 rounds of layoffs before I myself left, I've lived this life already far more than I ever wanted to. I saw three stages involving these layoffs.

Pre-Layoff:

I think most people have already alluded to the number one thing to do and that is to be open and honest. Each round of layoffs we did, I was sending out regular emails as we learned the percentage, absolute numbers, and rough timing of the layoffs. It was better than people speculating (some rounds we were laying off 5% and the rumours were as high as 30%), and let everyone know as much as I could tell them without doing anything that corporate would have fits about. I was told repeatedly that these communiqués were appreciated, not just by my group, but by all the other groups they got forwarded to (there wasn't a lot of communication going on in other areas).

Lay-off Day:

It is really important to treat the people being let go with respect. That meant treating them as professionals and letting them say goodbye to their colleagues. It meant being present as a leader - not going off to hide in an office but making yourself available, both to the people being laid off, and the people remaining. I would wander the floors on these days and speak openly to any of the small groups that would naturally gather. It was equally important to speak to the people that had just been let go - it's not like they were now lesser people. Sometimes they would vent, but usually the fact that you were willing to speak to them openly and honestly diminished any hostility. And all people, including those remaining, want to know why or how the laid off employees were selected...it's important to open up as much as possible (I used to explain the process in detail). Staff were told to

take off whenever they wanted as there was no expectation that people could perform under these circumstances.

Rebuilding

Getting the team moving again required a lot of inertia. People would be wounded for days and would need some time to get back to the old pace…the issue being obviously that you need them moving at a higher pace to pick up the remaining work. The leader's job was to convince them that the best way we could move forward was to get things running again quickly such that we could support the business we needed to keep from having to do another round (unfortunately said company had execs without a clue which is why we had so many rounds of layoffs). Some people would just complain about the additional workload, others would step up and work harder to try and improve things. In a continually shrinking department, it became obvious who was going to be on the next lifeboat and who wasn't, so effectively the team got smaller but stronger all the time. The other thing that was required was for the team to keep in contact with the former colleagues and for the managers to help them get placed elsewhere…extending a helping hand allowed many of them to get rehired, or to go off and 'escape from cubicle nation' finally. In order to keep the team motivated (no we didn't throw a party), we needed to keep on doing the things that would help them progress in their careers - new & challenging assignments, training, mentoring, and personal development programs were even more important to give them the skills to fill the holes. And they need to be appreciated…they want to know that you understand they are doing the work of 2 people (or whatever the figure is) and want recognition. As best as you can, it is also important to figure out a way to reduce the overall load, because people cannot work extended hours for a long time without affecting quality of work output. Lastly, recognize that there are the gamuts of emotions in the remaining employees (hurt, guilt, fear, loss of trust) and that they do need some time to recover, and the management team needs to allow those emotions to come out.

In large companies, it is very much about the immediate management team and not so much the executives. So motivating the team after a layoff was fairly straightforward as long as the immediate

management team all practiced the open and honest communication (it made up for a lot of the sins of the executives) and followed the points above. But people can't go on like this forever…in our case it would have been better to make massive cuts all at once rather than pick away at the team continually. Eventually everyone begins to lose faith in the guys at the top and their direction and regaining momentum never happens.

Books - I think people have mentioned William Bridge's work (Transitions)

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Yes, it is hard for those let go, and it is also hard for those who remain. The workplace changes and loses some of its enjoyment. The challenge for leaders is to not only address as a personal experience, but reorganized how the work is done so that people have the opportunity to meet the increased demands placed on them.

Reply by **Kayla Lamoreaux**

Perhaps from the perspective of an employee in this situation. My husband's company's last few training meetings have had themes of "Do More With Less." He is a QA manager in a software development organization that has several very critical projects. As a result of "doing more with less" he is now managing double the amount of engineers and projects which makes his job more challenging and time consuming.

I think it all depends on how you look at it and what you expect. Attitude is huge - right now he is looking at this as an opportunity to grow as a manager and also to learn to be more effective in doing more in less time. Quite frankly we are very grateful that he is employed doing the work he loves while many in his situation do not have jobs. However, my husband is very motivated by achievement which brings me to a whole other way to look at this -

[Spencer, Shenk, Capers & Associates](#) have some very valuable LPMA training which is similar to personality testing and measures the motivations of an individual, also training managers to see the motivating factors which enable them to be more effective in employee placement.

According to LPMA, people are motivated by Power, Affiliation or Achievement and most of the time a mixture of those things. When you understand the underlying factors, you realize that meeting the employees' needs for their motivation type is directly connected with morale.

I think your ideas are fabulous and there are many more in the feedback here - it would be powerful to create a presentation that ties into the motivations of the workers in that company and thereby boosts morale.

I can't wait to see what you create!

Reply by **Ricardo A. Gonzalez**

Motivation is a huge piece of any attempt to change course, no matter how small, how painless. The bigger the task and the more pain…well, the more important motivation becomes!

Regardless which model or tool you use, there is great value in exploring Emotional Intelligence as a field. There are fabulous tools such as the Bar-On EQ-i test and the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) which help measure how attuned individuals are to their own emotions and the emotions of others. Tests aside, there is a TON of knowledge and information out there regarding Emotional Intelligence and how it influences everything from early childhood education to organizational effectiveness. You can start any search with the authors of those tests: Reuven Bar-On, John D. Mayer, Peter Salovey, and David Caruso (not the actor!). Just names to start with.

The Four Branches of Emotional Intelligence

Perceiving Emotions: The ability to perceive emotions in oneself and others as well as in objects, art, stories, music, and other stimuli

Facilitating Thought: The ability to generate, use, and feel emotion as necessary to communicate feelings or employ them in other cognitive processes

Understanding Emotions: The ability to understand emotional information, to understand how emotions combine and progress through relationship transitions, and to appreciate such emotional meanings

Managing Emotions: The ability to be open to feelings, and to modulate them in oneself and others so as to promote personal understanding and growth

From "Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), by J. D. Mayer, P. Salovey, and D. R. Caruso, 2002, Toronto, Ontario: Multi-Health Systems, Inc.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar** on July 8, 2009 at 8:37pm

Last year the EQ world lost one of its best when Galba Bright died. Galba was a EQ coach and consultant in Jamaica. He was such an encouraging person. Here's his Facebook profile. What I know of EQ is through his influence upon me. He would have been a great member for Triiibes.

Thanks for adding new resources for us to use.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Thanks, Kayla. I'll share as much as I can as soon as I can.

Reply by **Gregory Schillinger**

The principle of Morale in our current definition is a tricky one for a leader. If we are to always hold ourselves personally responsible for our team's morale then we have to understand that the expectation of the group will almost never be reached.

It is fundamental for a leader to give the team every opportunity to understand and share the information about the state of the business they are in. If there is a constant stream of data being shared then without the analysis of the leader dominating the message it leaves the interpretation

open for each individual. If we have the individuals on our team the truly understand personal accountability and responsibility then they will look inward for morale and forward motivation.

All we can do is to be honest and be open to the inevitable questions that will arise in times as these. This is truest way to let every ones' morale reach it owns level. If we are constantly attempting to bolster an idea that is not believable at its core than the biggest hit to morale will be our own.

Reply by **David F. Pu'u**

Very pertinent points Gregory. It speaks right to the heart of the issue.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

I believe honesty and transparency are critical issues in dealing with morale. But I also think that leaders need to be really explicit in their support of people. They have to believe in them in real and tangible ways.

When I go into a project, I tell my client that part of what I'm looking for is an increase in their peoples' participation and contribution to bettering the business. I'm not talking about having more responsibilities. I am talking about taking initiative to make a difference because their leaders have confidence in them. In this I see leaders as coaches and cheerleaders standing on the sidelines while

their team is on the field. This becomes easier when we truly believe that each person has some significant contribution to make.

When people say that they try to hire people who are smarter and more able than them, it shouldn't be just false humility, but a real strategic approach to building a team. The older I get, the more aware I am of my limitations, so I'm looking for the sharpest people around to put on my team. As a member of one team here, I've taken the lead on developing a parallel team focused on another aspect of our mission to our community. What excites me is that each of these people are really talented and have much to offer. All I have to do is provide a structure for them to create the opportunities we are looking for. It helps me see how leaders in other settings can do the same thing.

Reply by **Conor Kenny**

Good question Ed,

A few random thoughts gained from experience, not textbooks;

(1) Leaders need to level with Staff. The truth. Most people can handle that and it underpins integrity. Down the road, he will have credibility.

(2) Within reason, share the challenges with them. They need to know.

(3) Avoid 'Team Building' outings. Like a firework, all exciting, very dramatic, fun and then….they fizzle out.

(4) Make time for important one-to-one chats. Different people have different needs, reactions, weak points.

(5) Listen and listen with care. So important.

(6) Ask for help. The answer reveals lots.

(7) Avoid future promises of great rewards. The future might not happen.

(8) Break the challenge into bite sized chunks, divide it up, let them build and fix.

(9) Avoid short bursts of mega optimism, dangerous.

(10) Have a little reflection time but not much.

(11) Remember to stay with facts not opinion.

(12) Be equal and fair.

(13) Remember, motivation always comes from working hard, and to a goal

(14) If you do reward, make it something tangible and not money. A trophy perhaps.

(15) Set short term goals and acknowledge success.

(16) Lead by example, lead from the front.

(17) Create a 'fail-safe' environment, a place where it's safe for an idea to fail.

(18) Create a creative 'ideas' forum and let them problem solve

(19) Keep in touch lots but for a reason

(20) Squash gossip, gossip leaders and toxic thinking time.

Action raises morale. Results raise morale,. Talk does not, it may inspire, even motivate, but it won't raise morale for any meaningful period.

I remember leading big teams and small teams through many storms. My overall ethos was always.... "When history is written, this won't be on your tombstone. In the greater scheme of things it really is not that important"

Difficult - Yes, Awkward - Yes, Inconvenient - Yes, Life threatening - No.

As the saying goes "Success lies on the far side of failure" and it's all part of our little voyage through life.

Reply by **Joel D Canfield**

My favorite response to this thread, Conor. Thank you.

Reply by **Conor Kenny**

Joel,

You are very kind indeed.

Thank You.

Conor.

Reply by **Gavin MacDonald**

I have to agree with Joel. This is great stuff, Conor.

Ed, tell your team to keep the communication tight. Clarify the actions and results required. Re-adjust when necessary, and keep moving forward.

Gavin

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Thanks, Gavin. A principal focus of what I'm going to say is about communication. It is such an important key to dealing with change.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Conor, you are one wise soul. I'm sure there is a story behind every lesson here. Thank you for sharing it with us.

My recommendation to everyone is to print off Conor's response and post it by your computer. Let the wisdom sink in.

Thank you very much.

Reply by **Shawn McCormick**

As everyone else has noted Conor, this is a great list. I've got my copy printed. :-)

Reply by **David F. Pu'u**

Great topic Ed,

There is a fantastic book in the responses within this thread. Having run companies that were in growth as well as decline, and done a lot of the sports coaching thing, paramilitary training- work, I see most if not all intelligent solutions already are contained in this thread.

But here is my POV simplified for the sake of brevity.

Leadership's purpose ought to be the establishing of a common goal around which the remaining team can galvanize.

In times of change and crises (for this is indeed one of the two, depending on where the axe falls and the direction the individual team member's moral compass points) people generally will not truly fall into rank unless they perceive that there is a glimmer of hope.

It is human nature to eventually go into either fight or flight mode. This translates into various forms of behavior depending on the team member's history. The leader should get a grip on the location of each team member. You need to know what each will do prior to circumstances causing them to do it. (Think shepherd)

What we are looking at is establishing a revolution of sorts and in order to get all those shoulders applied to the task, this is what I would do in a nutshell.

Let em all bitch. Air the grievances. Acknowledge them. Then list them and as a group put them aside having identified them. The solution in not there. But pertinent information is, both individually and collectively.

Marines bitch. This occurs when the pressure is off. But they do not complain under load. This is healthy really, as it acknowledges the personal suffering of the individual, and helps the leader to locate them and deal with any potential

relocating or shoring up necessary.

Shore up each person by establishing a contrived (designed) transparency. In effect, be honest but do not give out information that the team member does not really require in order to be effective. Organizations tend to depersonalize and therefore depower the individual by enforcing the concept that they are a depreciable asset. Bad idea in time of crises. You need to give that person some power back. Makes for a stronger whole.

Establish that common goal.

Establish individual tasks that embody new personal growth. Each person is valuable. Give them something old and familiar, as well as something new to do. (Feargus' lollipop is a great analogy) Each person must be given an opportunity to contribute that is personally identifiable.

Finally I would look for a means of lightening the emotional load that involves some sort of group play- activity.

Find something that initiates the esprit des corps that turns those individuals into a stronger corporal body. It can be related to the company goals or not, depending on the location of that team's collective consciousness.

The old adage of a chain only being as strong as its weakest link is quite applicable to your scenario Ed. So of course you really are all about finding and helping that link which will change as team members are eliminates.

Build a potential exit strategy whereby the team members see that there is a system of support should they be shown the door.

This was very interesting for me to read down through, as I have recently gotten sucked into a civic focus group here in Ventura which is endeavoring to establish a healthy direction of growth for a City. Yesterday was the group's first collective action. This thread was a bull's eye for me personally. The past two weeks we engaged the above process.

The establishment of a vision soon generated esprit des corps. Good thing, because it was tested in the first action. They did well. No pay either. Payback comes in the form of acknowledgment of each individual's participation in determining a healthy direction for a community which has basically no fiscal viability.

 Reply by **Elizabeth Teklinski**

Ah… the downside of a tribe. Just imagine if we could be *fired* from Triiibes without warning. We are told it's a business decision. Perhaps we are even graded on our performance in our community here. We feel fear, shame, pride, avoidance… A workplace is a tribe. It's like a family. It's very discouraging to feel rejected by the tribe. It brings up all kinds of primal feelings of archetypal shunning and excommunication. In ancient culture that meant *death.*

I think it's interesting that the collective conversation is focusing more and more on death. MJ's memorial really drove it home.

I wish there was a way for a tribe to help equip a member to go establish a new tribe. What if employers gave workshops on taking the leap to the next level. Employees improve themselves, they feel less fear, they focus on the positive, they feel like they graduate versus being eliminated…

Now that's where corporate trainers could do really really well in a time like right now.

Reply by **Joel D Canfield**

My first impulse on this thread was to give them all copies of [Jonathan Fields](#)' [Career Renegade](#) and help them move on.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Good idea!

Reply by **David F. Pu'u**

Okay I am going to read that myself!

Reply by David F. Pu'u

I love your perspective Elizabeth. Having killed off a Corporation myself, your words struck home for me.

I think that one of the bullet points needs to be a communication of the acceptance of the death of one venue being the avenue for new birth. Of course that sounds easier when you read it than the reality involved in travail, as the tribe member comes home to a family and home with news of the loss of his job. The concept used to horrify me as I ran my own Corp. I would worry about my employee's welfare. It was an interesting process, sorting that all out.

My old employees all do well today. I watched them succeed with a mixture of relief and gratitude

Reply by Ed Brenegar

Elizabeth, thanks for your deep heart felt pathos for this issue.

You wrote, "I wish there was a way for a tribe to help equip a member to go establish a new tribe." The only thing that keeps this from happening are excuses, in my estimation. The problem is that we have been living in an organizational culture for hundreds of years that basically told people to stay put, don't make waves, and do what you are told. We've treated people like children, and so it is clear why morale gets bad when hard times happen.

My whole approach to leadership is built upon the premise that one of the most important measures of leadership is the level of initiative that others take. When they voluntarily take initiative to do the

right thing, in this sense, to create a tribe, they are growing into being leaders within their role in the organization. Part of the problem is that organizations don't really value leadership training. They value job specific skills training. They train for activities, not impact. What gets missed is how people can collaboration with others in the coordination of their work. As downsizing continues, these people skills are becoming even more important.

So, your statement while true in many respects is really a lame excuse (not yours of course, but for plenty of people) for the lack of leadership in their organizations. What I love about Triiibes is that we are all leaders here, each doing our best to lead the rest. This is a model community for how people can learn to communicate and work together. It doesn't answer all the questions, but it takes us a far piece down that road.

Thanks very much.

Reply by **Elizabeth Teklinski**

In Michigan, this dynamic feels quite amplified. Just about every person who held a management position in our family has lost/are losing their jobs. It is a death. The gig of manager in the balloon factory seems to be just about up. Confused and scared many of these people are going back to school to get MBAs (even though one person already has a Master's Degree). It is really difficult when all the rules change and even a business school has no real insight into what is going on here. Seth is discovering first hand that marketing taught in the universities dates back to the 1960s and when implemented often times harms more than it helps.

Reply by Steve Mauldin

Ed,

A timely discussion….

The entire organization watches how every employee is treated when they are laid off. If the worst employee being laid off is "perp-walked" out the door, the best employee remaining will believe that this can just as easily be their fate.

I recommend "The Answer To How Is Yes" by Peter Block.

Steve

Reply by Ed Brenegar

Boy, isn't that true. It is why character is such an important element of leadership.

Thanks for book recommendation. I've read Peter's other books. I'm sure this is great.

Reply by **David F. Pu'u**

Ed,

Just breezed through a great book (you may have read it already). Donna placed it in front of me this morning and said :"Read it" so I did. It could provide some good info.

Outliers The Story of Success, by Malcolm Gladwell

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Yes, thought it was great. When I went back and tracked my 10,000 hours after starting my business, it was when I really began to get it right.

Reply by **Ricardo A. Gonzalez**

Outliers is a fantastic book. It's like jumping into a cold lake: it shocks your system. I find the concepts bouncing around inside my brain all of the time. It has me seeing 10,000 hours everywhere I go.

Example: I was just at Disney World with my family and friends'. Both families come from drastically different socio-economic backgrounds, different educational backgrounds, and different cultural/racial backgrounds. Our experience of the parks was also very different, and they reflect all the things that make us different.

One of the biggest things I noticed was that the "educational" experiences in each of the parks are what attracted my kids even though they are both under the age of 10. My friends' kids were attracted to the thrill rides. OK. Personal preferences, right? Sure. However, in casually talking about it with my friend, her children view the world outside of the few hours they spend at school as being an escape from the shackles of the education system. My children, on the other hand, view the entire world as their classroom, and their time in school is an extension of that. Again, personal preferences. My wife is the one who made the Big Connection (she read the book, too): my children are actively working on their 10,000 hours of education year-round. That's a point that Gladwell makes in the book. So, I saw, "in living color," one of the points Gladwell was making about the socio-economic influence on 10,000 hours, thus "mastery" of any given skill. It was startling. And it happened at Disney World. Not what I expected from the drive down to Florida!

Reply by **Rahul Deodhar**

Fantastic post Ed. Awesome comments loved every bit of it. A whole lot is already said so I won't repeat. Just a few pointers.

Transparency is "How" of communication - "what" is also important

Usually leaders restrict transparency to facts. I suggest they open their thought process to their team. Unformed ideas, lines of thought everything that relates to future of employees could be made available to them. Let employees make suggestions and have a say in the course of action.

Champion a search for alternatives

Can this be avoided? How to reduce expenses without reducing head-count. Reward from bottom-up and pay-cuts from top-down.

Actively build safety net

This could be help in retraining or rehiring. Talking to recruitment consultants for entire team. Get opportunities for people (along what they expect). And of course ask before taking this course of action. You watch their back both inside the company and outside. Trust me - your team will watch your back and they will know you are helping them even if you don't explicitly say it.

The waiting period dilemma

The period between "firing is on but I am still working" to "I am fired" is critical period. Free the employees to create solutions for the team - (Its NOT "do as you like")

Leaders' pain does not matter - should be avoided

Every leader goes through a lot of pain when letting go of their team. Often they try to share it with the team. This transparency does not help. Leaders' role is entirely about concern for the team.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Rahul, this is a great addition to what has been said.

However, I'd expand the last one just a little bit. The pain isn't about the leader, but about the team. Therefore, his or her emotion about their pain is important to express in an appropriate manner. I've seen too many instances where hard news was presented with a coldness that demeaned those who were on the receiving end. But isn't this question part of the problem. We've made emotions a part of the conflict, and not part of the solution. This is where emotional intelligence can help us.

Reply by **Rahul Deodhar**

Absolutely well said - the balance should be right. A leader cannot go on expressing how things are difficult for him/her while being cold about teams' emotion.

Reply by **Ramesh Sambasivan**

My blog post on the book Upbeat might be relevant, as my friend Didier points out.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Thanks, Ramesh. This looks great. I look forward to watching the videos.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Thanks everyone for contributing to this discussion on morale. I want to throw a slab of conceptual bacon on the table for everyone to chew on.

As I've read through all your responses, I see a pattern that I see   in virtually every situation I'm in and is captured in my Circle of Impact diagram. Here's a simple version of the image.
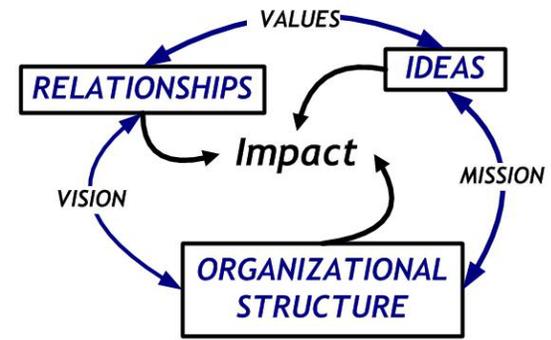
I want to make one point about how I see morale functioning in this perspective. Old ways of leading are focused on managing the structural processes of a business. Communication and relational aspects of the business are secondary considerations. The major transition that the morale issue points to is a shift to a more dynamic leadership context. Instead of managing processes, leaders become the facilitators of the leadership capacity of people. If they develop people to work this dynamic of structure, ideas and relationships, then the organization is transformed through the shared communication and coordination of the whole team.

So, from my perspective, I see the morale issue as symptomatic of the shift to a new approach to organizational leadership. If we are the leader of a business or a unit within a corporation, how we communicate and empower our people to act is going to be the key to whether morale is an issue or not. It is more than just showing appreciation. It is more than rallying the troops with banal motivational speeches. It is seeing our role in developing the capacity of people lead. When they are empower to lead, then they have the power to deal with their own issues of morale. They become more resilient, more resourceful, and more responsible for the impact their position is to create. And in so doing, we are granting them the prerogative to change the structure to make it easier for the mission to be fulfilled. I see this as a huge shift from the way things have been for centuries.

Let's take this to a more practical level. The question for the leader is what kind of problem is morale? Is it a structure problem, an idea one or a relationship issue? In reality, it doesn't matter because ultimately all three dimensions of leading play into the solution. If you treat this as a managing structure issue, there is no way to change the structure enough to resolve it, particularly if you are in a declining industry where job cuts and consolidation is forcing disruptive change. As a result, we need to begin to engage people in a new level of conversation so that new ideas can emerge that address the structure issues from a totally different perspective.

This is a framework that can incorporate all your brilliant suggestions as conceptual tools for a leader to use with his or her people to create change in the midst of change. Welcome to the world of 21st century leadership.

Thanks again for your great contributions. It really is fantastic.

 Reply by **Anne McCrossan**

Ed hi, there's a fantastic spectrum of ideas in this thread, kudos to you for starting such an interesting discussion.

I've been mulling a few thoughts on it for a day or so and want to mention something that hasn't been covered too much. It's intensely laudable to take a stiff upper lip approach to personal issues of low morale and one I endorse, up to a point. At the same time I don't want to lose sight of some deeper issues I think are at play.

Many people have talked too in this thread about being honest which I also endorse. But since the days of 'Who moved my Cheese' we've been trying to get to grips with the new nature of change, this state of disruptive continuous change that's been accelerating, and honestly? I don't think we're getting any better at dealing with it than we were two decades ago. Which begs the question, why is that?

I was at a conference called [Reboot Britain](#) on Monday. It's been heavily featured in the media over here. The title tells you we're beginning to get our heads around the fact we need to do things differently. No matter the honesty in accepting times are tough, and no matter how courageous and stoic a workforce, none of it gets around a basic need for re-invention where there is one.

That conference had a packed agenda with multiple strands to it. One of the most powerful as it turns out was a lego-building exercise - yes - lego as a powerful tool to

We need to be participants in nature, not the prey of a soul-less leviathan

Photo by D.Gauntlett, posted on Flickr, 6th July '09

harness the repressed energies that just dealing with stuff can detract from. You can see the [full slideshow](#) of what happened here, but in the meantime here's one snapshot to give you an idea.

A cause for low morale perhaps? I think so. That dead-behind-the-eyes syndrome associated with low morale is a manifestation of some deep problems that no amount of motivating can cure if the root causes aren't dealt with. Without that there are no creative outcomes, just management ones, and they have short shelf lives. We can all learn to dance whilst bullets are being sprayed at our feet, but really, do we want to?

Continuous, disruptive change is inhumane in my opinion. Human existence can cope with it, bitching and acceptance and letting go all help, all the fine ideas in here do too, but whether we will ever really thrive in those conditions is another question.

The human body adapts far more slowly to change than the technology that is reshaping our economics allows. Post traumatic stress disorder is becoming pandemic in corporate life for a reason. Until we look at reinvention as an option and liberate the possibility of more creative outcomes we're blinding ourselves to truer opportunities ahead of us and denying real prizes of wellbeing as a result.

Someone wrote to me recently saying this and put it this way - 'We live in a new world and our structures are, generally speaking, hopelessly out of date. Just accepting this can to many create an emotional response of relief, which indicates how much stress we experience collectively because as a society we haven't caught up yet with the changes that are already happening in our psyche.'

So how many managers and executives are dealing with that as a cause of low morale? Isn't it time we saw the opportunity for what it is? There's really no point in skirting around this as an issue. That's the 'common goal around which teams can galvanize' as David put it, and that's, in my opinion, what leaders need to be focusing on.

Reply by **Didier Daglinckx**

How do you make it accessible ?

It looks such a big challenge, far greater than work.

It's life, society, … that needs a transformation, mutation

Reply by **Shawn McCormick**

Hmm. Interesting. So getting people to accept that this is the way it is may create relief in itself? Worth further discussion for sure…'Who Moved My Cheese" by Spencer Johnson gave some insight into how to deal with change, but this is quite different…

Reply by **Anne McCrossan**

That's what I think, Shawn - that transformation most typically comes about through an acceptance of what is in order to give up the resistance to change. Or to put it another way, 'madness is doing the same thing and expecting a different result'.

Breaking free of a collective insanity or malaise means accepting that things now aren't working and stress and depression are often indicators that a problem is present. My 0.2c…

Reply by **Steven Devijver**

I think this sums the morale debate up pretty well. It's a short video on the idea of setting up back offices for dealing with citizen demands in local government. The advice is: don't do it, because you'll be frustrating your citizens and you'll be killing your people's morale.

Reply by **Richard Merrick**

Hello All

I think that there is such a stream of great points in this that we should try and capture them somehow. I'd like to make a suggestion and volunteer the services of our local team of here to do it, including Triiibester Caroline Langdell (writer and also my Daughter!)

What I am thinking of is trying to capture the different thought streams that have emerged on:

1. What is Morale?

2. Why is it important?

3. How do we recognise it?

4. What are causes and destroys it?

5. Whose job is it?

6. Open questions

I do not see this as a "how to" - for me, all along the questions have been the real joy, and it is these I would like to capture so that people can frame their own answers - a sort of "Wisdom of Triiibes" with an intro by Ed, credits to all who have posted, and a bibliography of books, links etc. Once complete, I suggest we make it "free to air" for people to use as they will.

What do you think? - suggestions and ideas welcome.

Richard

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

I'm all for this.

I'd like to find a way to get this into the hands of every Triiibes member, of course, without spamming them.

Any thoughts on timing?

Peter Mello and I could do a podcast on this experience at [Weekly Leader](#).

When we roll this out, we could also do a Morale day on Twitter to let people know about the resource.

I also asked Conor to take his great piece and put it together in a handout. He has done it and I hope he'll post a link to it here soon.

Everyone, make sure we have up to date contact info, especially URL links.

Thanks, Richard and Caroline, for the contributions you are about to make. And thank you everyone else for the contributions of your wisdom and good cheer.

Reply by **Anne McCrossan**

Richard that's a great idea - most definitely

Reply by **David F. Pu'u**

I really like this idea of Richard's.

The concept of Ed's of Using Weekly Leader is great as well.

This thread keeps bringing me back to the concept of support. It has broad scope and is an integral, vital thing.

In doing an increasingly greater number of Community benefit projects here in California, support has become a cornerstone in the process, without which a movement gains no real "legs".

I see this discussion on managing morale has created a river of creative and pragmatic solutions here, and would love to see it galvanize and become a resource.

Great question regarding timing Ed. In looking at this comprehensively, I see it as a developing resource with global scope ultimately. Starting here, with Triiibes.

I perceive the need. It is apparent that we recognize the value and uniqueness of the light in this thread.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

An observation.

We are looking at the issue of morale here. The reality is that none of us have a morale problem. Most likely because, regardless of the level of change we are experiencing, we refuse to allow the premise that we are not in control of our lives to take root. This is a real key for me.

Each of you by your own volition chose to contribute to this discussion. You made the effort to participate, and the effect of your contribution is the elevation of our lives for these few days this week. To me, this is what should be happening in our offices and businesses. We enable others to have this sense of confidence that they can, on their own, take the initiative to contribute in ways that matter.

This isn't because this is the Triiibes group. The Triiibes group is this way because you all are this way. I'm very glad to be numbered in your tribe, and again, I thank each of you for making a dent in the universe this week.

 Reply by **Ed Bodnar**

Ed, this is a tough situation, as a teacher, I experienced this from the employee's view point so I'll share my thoughts that way. As a new teacher in a public school system we are not guaranteed rehire next year, but we know that if we do our job well, and stay out of any controversies, we increase our chances of being retained until we get tenure. (Which incidentally doesn't mean they can't fire us, just that they now have to have a good reason for doing so)

So my question to you is this; what was the criteria for deciding who got laid off? Some companies will lay off the most senior and highest paid employees, while others will do the opposite, and then some will lay off the least productive. If it is a matter of the least productive, let the employees find out this was the reason in a way that they can handle and I'll bet they will be more productive. For raising morale, I've found that nothing works better at this than food, try having a cookout every now and then during working hours where the employees can take their lunch break and get a burger, or steak, etc. I also recommend giving the employees a chance to have an open complaining session with you (or other management) where they are allowed to voice their frustrations, but not have to worry about consequences of it. (This is best done one on one with them in an open door situation)

Just some thoughts.

Reply by **Jodi Kaplan**

She's too modest to say so, but I think [Anne's manifesto](#) addresses this very well. Employees who are corporate zombies and dead behind the eyes aren't going to function well (been there, done that)!

Just as an aside, a few days ago on LinkedIn (alas I can't find the question now) someone asked whether it was OK for employees to spend time on Facebook or answering personal email at work. Several people responded with answers like "it's work not play, do what you're told", or "I'm not paying you for personal stuff, leave that at home."

I thought, I never want to work with (or for) you!!

Reply by **David F. Pu'u**

I just read through Anne's manifesto. Vital information. Once again. Thanks Jodi.

Reply by **Anne McCrossan**

That's a good point Jodi.

Culturally, we've been trained and schooled in 'anti-integration'… hierarchies have dominated, and have *wanted* to dominate, and this has suited them. Now things are different… integration and

affinity of purpose are more important, and unless there's congruence between who we are and what we do we're ineffective, things don't flow, and, one way or another, that costs.

The rise of networks has created this shift because everything's interconnected. The morale issue comes to the fore when we're not able to create closer integration between our personal and professional lives.

It's now the case that corporate reputations are connected to dependent on the reputations of the people within them. Everything's more trackable and transparent, so it makes sense for what we do at work and who we are to be increasingly congruent, and to ensure as much as possible that it is.

There are all sorts of reasons for low morale, but it seems to me that lack of alignment between who we are and what we do is certainly one of them.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

I certainly agree. Well said.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

My client for next week's webinar sent me a book that I'll want to read before Tuesday. It is Tactical Transparency by Shel Holtz and John C Havens.

Here's their definition of transparency.

Transparency is the degree to which an organization shares the following with its stakeholder publics:

Its leaders: The leaders of transparent companies are accessible and are straightforward when talking with members of key audiences

Its employees: Employees of transparent companies are accessible to reinforce the public view of the company and to help people where appropriate.

Its values: Ethical behavior, fair treatment, and other values are on full display in transparent companies.

Its culture: How a company does things is more important today than what it does. The way things get done is not a secret in transparent companies.

The results of its business practices, both good and bad: Successes, failures, problems, and victories all are communicated by transparent companies.

Its business strategy: Of particular importance to the investment community but also of interest to several other audiences , a company's strategy is a key basis for investment decisions. Misalignment of a company's strategy and investor's expectations almost always result in disaster.

Two questions related to this:]

1. How would the practice of these policies influence morale?

2. How agile and adaptable would these policies and practices make a company in the midst of dramatic change?

Reply by **Richard Merrick**

Hoo - BIG questions!

In my view, real potential conflicts; in a listed company, there seems likely to be a real standoff between employee morale (and by employees, I class all those below C level bonus receivers) and those with direct financial multiple stakes (C level, shareholders).

For financial stakeholders, transparency takes away magic, insider knowledge and edge. Chances of a killing are lower, and so, presumably, is morale. For employees, whose day to day lives are often boundaried by their work, transparency is a powerful motivator; they know what is happening, can display pride in their business, and feel good about what they do.

The implications are curious. It would imply that it is difficult to have an outperforming, transparent company with shareholders whose interest is primarily financial, whereas private companies, whose owners are responsible for both profit and ethic, can choose the balance between the two.

By extension, an agile and adaptable business needs, as a condition, unified control and discretion over the balance of financial and social returns. This favours private businesses.

Not sure we can ever get to a truly transparent, sustainable business unless there is a complete marriage of ethical and financial responsibility. This implies a real difficulty for public companies to be agile.

But, of course, I may be wrong.

Reply by **Roland Feith**

'Morale' is shareware. The only thing you can do is share the information and most of all… the passion. The ones that 'jump off' are just part of the natural selection that takes place to achieve your selected goal with the right people.

Reply by **DennisS**

This is all quite interesting. Looks to me there are about 100 replies. There was one spouse who spoke of her husband taking on more responsibility because of a layoff. There was one teacher speak to the realities in the field of education. It seems to me that educators are in demand, even if it is a 9 month gig at a time and a person has a choice of where to move for the next gig. This may seem harsh, but at least most teachers do have a choice.

No offense intended. Triiibes is about education - about teaching others. Do you see what is missing here? There is a lack of perspective. This is a place of many like-minded people. There is hardly any perspective besides management on this issue. This seems like a B.S. degree, and not a well-rounded liberal arts education. It reminds me of the seminary professor who said that every potential pastor should have to go through a life-threatening illness before they could be ordained. There is such a difference in perspective when one has experienced what the other is going through.

I began work at Boeing in August 1997. I was fired in January 2002. The term used was "lay off". "Pink slips" were handed out. It wasn't done in public. If you didn't want others to know, then you only had to keep your mouth shut. Of course, nearly everyone shared that they had received the pink slip and

had 60 days remaining. They found out from their direct supervisor in private, then broke the word to others within a week.

My job had elements required by the FAA. Our function could not be performed by less than two persons, and only if they could not take vacation. I was rated number 2 in the group of 7, then 6, then 5, then 4, then 3, then 2. And then the surprise came. My boss "bumped" back into the work group and I was out the door.

I went through all the levels of Grief. As wiki points out…"Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross has posited sequential stages of grief including denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, which are commonly referred to as the "grief cycle."

The thing is, I didn't just go through the grief cycle when I was laid off, I went through it with each round of layoffs - as I "lost" friends and co-workers. Perhaps you remember the events of 9/11, and the lack of air travel after that and airlines backing out of "firm" orders. This wasn't something to blame on poor management. This wasn't even something cyclical. This was completely unpredictable.

Sadly it wasn't my familiar supervisor who filled out the paperwork and escorted me out. It was my new supervisor, and he didn't take time to review how important I was to the company, nor even offer me a handshake.

Here is what I found helpful: We were given all the information and forms regarding unemployment, how to search for a job, training and degrees being offered by local educational institutions, etc. We were informed of local ministries and agencies who could help, such as food pantries. And we were allowed to search for another job, on company time, during that last 60 days. Believe me, there wasn't much productive work done by those who had received their pink slip.

I learned some important lessons. 1) Those who are laid off first have first shot at any available jobs in the local economy, while those laid off later will find it even more difficult to find a job. 2)

Employers do not want to hire those who have been laid off, as they figure the employee will go back to work at the company if there is a turnaround within three years. 3) Some of those applying for jobs are only doing so to keep their unemployment compensation coming in, and really don't want to be offered a job - so they show up wearing inappropriate things and intentionally make errors on their application so they don't get an interview. 4) It is extremely difficult to find a job when you don't have a job. 5) It is extremely difficult to get motivated to go look for a job. 6) No matter my education and work ethic, I could not get an interview.

Okay, I'm not looking for sympathy. The events of 9/11 impacted me deeply. A month later it was clear to me that ministry was to be the purpose and direction of my life. This was announced to the congregation two months before receiving the pink slip, and four months before layoff. I had become progressively more involved in the congregation, and was working on a Bachelor's in Christian Ministry, which was actually being reimbursed by the company.

Being laid off was the kick I needed to get moving. We moved to seminary with three kids: 10, 11, & 12. We lived off my 401k for three years. The company called me with an offer of employment when I was nearly done with seminary - with timing such that I would have maintained my original start date, and would receive a raise. Even though it was double what I would make as a pastor, I declined the offer - but not without a lot of turmoil and soul searching all over again. (I really loved my job there - very unique work and dealing with people at all levels and disciplines.)

Now in regard to those remain in a company (the main reason for this thread), the morale isn't going to improve by communication with in an open and authentic manner. Receiving more work to be done, feeling like you should have been the one to go, wondering if you can handle all the extra work now dumped in your lap, and so many other things make many depressed. I know now that it would have helped me to have a good cry when my friends and co-workers got laid off. But this wasn't facilitated. A reasonable pause to consider our feelings, perhaps a good cry, could help people to grieve. Instead, self-doubt, thoughts of sabotage, and many other thoughts ran through minds. It is heavy and hard work to grieve - but those who remained were given little chance to grieve. When our

hopes are dashed it really helps to spend some time in grief work. Life is more likely to get back to "normal" in a quicker time period.

I'd suggest some facilitated grief work for those who remain. And I'd really suggest that those remaining have input as to how to divide the work of those who no longer work there. There can be very hard feelings in thinking it is unfair that I have to take on all this additional work while Johnny didn't get any additional work, and was already taking it easy (often largely perception which can be made closer to reality when Johnny gets a chance to say why he cannot take more work since he has duties which someone else didn't realize or forgot or didn't value as important).

Grief work and input in decisions. Being heard - very important. And even with this, morale is likely to take a hit for a while. There's likely to be more productivity though - which comes from more buy-in from being heard.

Talk of what the future might hold is cheap - it means not listening to the people. Let people live in the moment - to be humans with feelings, to simply "be". People will move on to better thinking and feeling - when it is time. Then you can once again talk about hopes for the future. Even with direction for my life, I still went through grief at being laid off. I still went through grief when others were laid off. And I found it hard to take that those who applied themselves the least were the ones to get a job, while those remaining until later rounds of layoff could not find meaningful work.

Which brings up my final point. Let people know how important they are - no matter if they are staying, or leaving.

Reply by **David F. Pu'u**

I hesitate to grade the myriad great responses here Ed, but Dennis5 has put a fresh breeze into the sails.

It has been interesting watching the discourse here.

Playing tag and watching all the bright lights flare is wondrous.

But what it all comes down to, is that we are one tribe with a single destination and whatever one does to assuage suffering is the correct tact. Do that, and everyone prospers. Morale comes in line.

The route may be more circuitous as a result, but I remain convinced, after a thorough read and examination of every link so generously proffered.

Reply by Ed Brenegar

Thank you, Dennis, for opening up our perception of the realities that people are going through. The group I'm doing the webinar for Tuesday has had about 11% of their workforce RIFed over the past year. In some cases, whole operations have been closed and the work consolidated into a regional center. The people I'm dealing with understand what you are describing. There is a "perfect storm" of converging trends that make the change not just temporary, but permanent. They are changing in more ways that simply because of the recession. They are having to making many of changes more quickly and drastically because the world of their industry is changing. It is having to make industry altering changes along with "aligning expenses with revenue." that makes this such a difficult time.

Part of my responsibility is to begin to help them develop new skill sets for those who remain as the leaders of their company.

Thank you Dennis for bringing a different perspective to this discussion. Twenty four years ago, I was downsized by the ending of my position, and the decision I made about my next position was a bad one. I moved my young family half way cross the country, and found myself in a place where I could succeed organizationally and my family not be happy. So, two years, two months, eight days and thirteen hours later, we moved back across the country to begin a new life in a new career that eventually led me to what I do today. I carry those hard times with me today, not in self-pity, but in a constant reminder of what people are actually experiencing is different than what they are showing at any moment.

There isn't a one-to-one correspondence, but on the emotional level I see this portrayed in the Harry Potter story. Harry is the "child that lived." Until he was eleven, he didn't know that there was this huge mythology built up around him. His experience was as the child who suffered. Suffered from a family who hated not just him, but everything he represented. If effect, there were two mythologies surrounding the Harry character. One of celebrity and hope for a savior. The other of hatred and rejection. None of this was Harry's doing. Yet, it was what he had to deal with. This is true for many people in organizations where their expectations and everyone else's are not aligned. You may be the department head now because your boss is gone. Those responsibilities are not yours by free choice, but are imposed on you by the organization. So, you learn to live with the unfair expectations that come with organizational change.

Harry lived in hell through his first eleven years of life. He goes off to Hogwarts, only to find that he is expected to be a heroic figure. He has celebrity status that some people love and others despise. Over time, he takes on the role of heroic leader, not because he is expected to do so, but out of love for his friends. He places his own safety at risk in order to care for those people who love him as Harry, not as the "child who lived." And if you know the story, that theme of the importance of friendship and sacrifice is key through out the series.

Harry is a great picture of the kind of contemporary leader we need. There is reality, no illusions about what is at stake. There is commitment to people. There is self-sacrifice by the leader. There is purpose and focus on the future. There is an inner resilience that gets embedded in those who follow, so that whatever happens, they know that they will get through. I wrote about Harry as the heroic sufferer because I see Harry's leadership largely missing in our contemporary organizations.

Dennis, your experience at Boeing is typical I suspect. And I'd say that it didn't have to be, but it was, and you learned from it, and are a better person and pastor as a result. It is on this that I believe Yoda was wrong when he said to Anakin, "Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering. I sense much fear in you." Suffering can also lead to truth and wholeness, and a strength of character that enables us to adapt to the demands of the time.

Thank you Dennis for bringing an important perspective into view.

Reply by **Judy Vorfeld**

I agree with you, Ed, that "suffering can also lead to truth and wholeness, and a strength of character that enables us to adapt to the demands of the time."

The key word is "can." It doesn't always happen, and it's not a matter of right or wrong…good or bad. But sometimes, for whatever reasons, suffering can indeed lead to truth and wholeness. That doesn't make the sufferer any more noble. Or less noble. Or anything. It's just the way life is.

So many of the things I've suffered through didn't change me much. I just suffered. But perhaps during another time or two of suffering I (for whatever reason) gained incredible insight during the process.

This insight may have helped me move in a different, more constructive pathway.

Or not.

Would I have moved in the same direction without the insight?

I don't know.

But I do know that somehow the suffering I experienced in the second instance seems to have subtly strengthened my emotional immune system. And that this, indeed helped me adapt to the demands of the time.

Thanks, Ed, for such an interesting conversation.

 Reply by **Jodi Kaplan**

I agree with certain parts of what Dennis said. I worked at one time for an association in New York City whose income depended partly on membership fees and partly on income from events. We had 7 rounds of layoffs and there was most definitely a grieving process (both for those let go and those remaining). The early layoffs had a "better" time: more generous compensation and an economy that was down, but not yet in a tailspin.

After 9/11 (which, of course, hit New York particularly hard), income sank (nobody wanted to travel), workload increased exponentially, and there was much misery and suffering. I can't say I agree that the suffering led (or can lead) to truth and wholeness. That's also where Harry Potter lost me (maybe it's a Christian thing).

I did decide I had to leave (even without a job) before I had a breakdown, but that was closer to the feeling of running from a burning building than anything else.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

I agree with you about the aftermath of 9/11.

Though there are people who try, I don't see HP as an explicitly Christian metaphor. Rather, I see him as more a throwback to the ancient Greeks of Homer and the Greek/ Roman Stoics.

We need to address the trauma that people in declining organizations experience. It isn't done by triumphalistic strategic plans and promises. It isn't done by just hunkering down to survive. It requires looking for the opportunity that exists in the moment. It isn't easy, but it is necessary to advance forward.
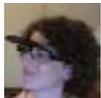
Reply by **Jodi Kaplan**

I didn't see HP as a Christian metaphor (until the end of the last book, with his "resurrection"). Before that he was, as you said, closer to a Greek hero. However, the idea that suffering leads to wholeness (in HP or elsewhere) doesn't resonate with me.

Fascinating discussion.

Reply by **David F. Pu'u**

I agree with both Ed and Jodi in that HP is not necessarily Christian metaphor.

The element of suffering as a means of process in forward momentum is intriguing. I think that one would need to establish just what suffering is. I always considered it to be relative to the individual.

In other words, what causes one to suffer may simply be a fire under another necessary to gain motion.

It is academic, but it has always seemed to me that suffering initiates basic physics. It translates to action: move away from the thing initiating the pain.

But using Christian analogy via application of Faith (Faith being Knowledge and Tangibility) suffering was endured as a price to be paid that would impart great benefit to the whole.

When one applies that tenet, it bestows a lot of responsibility in a myriad number of areas to the leader. It authors a large number of questions about appropriate response when one views suffering.

I have learned over the years that just because I have the power to stop suffering, it does not necessarily mean that I ought to. When one attempts to control a situation one also must bear the responsibility that this births.

This is the part of the discussion where transparency enters. It gives the power of choice back to the individual.

Reply by **Conor Kenny**

Ed (and everyone else)

As discussed, my updated - Mark 2 version - still meandering but based on my own personal experience.

Thoughts on Leadership, slightly random, often wandering but gained from a deep pool of experience by Conor Kenny.

1. Leaders need to level with Staff. The truth. Most people can handle that and it underpins integrity. Down the road, he will have credibility.

2. Within reason, share the challenges with them. They need to know.

3. Avoid 'Team Building' outings. Like a firework, all exciting, very dramatic, fun and then….they fizzle out.

4. Make time for important one-to-one chats. Different people have different needs, reactions, and weak points.

5. Listen and listen with care. So important.

6. Ask for help. The answer reveals lots.

7. Avoid future promises of great rewards. The future might not happen.

8. Break the challenge into bite sized chunks, divide it up, let them build and fix.

9. Avoid short bursts of mega optimism, dangerous.

10. Have a little reflection time but not much.

11. Remember to stay with facts not opinion.

12. Be equal and fair.

13. Remember, motivation always comes from working hard, and to a goal

14. If you do reward, make it something tangible and not money. A trophy perhaps.

15. Set short term goals and acknowledge success.

16. Lead by example, lead from the front.

17. Create a 'fail-safe' environment, a place where it's safe for an idea to fail.

18. Create a creative 'ideas' forum and let them problem solve

19. Keep in touch lots but for a reason.

20. Squash gossip, gossip leaders and toxic thinking time.

21. Do not confuse urgent with important, really dangerous.

22. Try to always move from "we think" to "we know"

23. Remember, business is all about relationships, inside and outside the tent.

24. Don't hold on to your wisdom, share it (just as I'm doing with you)

25. Restructure yourself as well as your business

26. Use the word challenge rather than 'problem'

27. As a Leader you are creating your legacy now - but for tomorrow

28. Ask yourself how you would like to be remembered when the storm is over – a provocative thought!

29. Ask not what you can do for yourself, ask what is the best thing I can do for my people

30. Remember the old saying (especially in a heated moment) "There are many things I have regretted saying but I have never regretted saying nothing"

31. If you found this useful, pass it on, share it and enjoy the little lessons therein.

32. If you got this far, you are trying hard, good for you, well done, you are a leader (because you are trying harder)

33. Thank you (and don't forget to say that lots, especially in a turbulent sea).

 Reply by **Richard Merrick**

This is a wonderfully evolving discussion. I Like Dennis's reflections and stark reality, it makes me think that morale is a leveraged emotion, based perhaps on our essential self confidence and

direction. At one level, we can be "infected" by morale, with the general energy levels in existence at an exciting time masking and overriding concerns we have deeper down (think banking in the good times). When things go awry, our lack of confidence and direction is exposed, and we can no longer delegate to the organisation the responsibility for what happens to us. It becomes very much our job - and for many that is scary.

So, perhaps morale is a bit of a fudge. In what are likely to be increasingly uncertain times (but not necessarily lacking opportunity) we need to be our own masters. If we choose to throw our lot in with an organisation where we see synergy between what it does and who we are, great - bags of morale all round. If however the synergy is lacking, morale lasts right up to the point the lack of synergy is exposed, and then the grieving cycle(s) set in.

A lesson for us all perhaps. Easier for those amongst us who have been through the process, and for whom the sting it holds has been drawn. For those with whom we work, and who we advise though, a key test; "why this organisation, why now, and how does it fit in your plan for yourself?"

It also means that great organisations have a purpose beyond money (those for whom money is all may be very successful for a while, but spiritually sterile) - tell me again why you're with this organisation, and how it fits your plans; what are you for?

Interesting stuff this.

Reply by **Conor Kenny**

A very simple (and perhaps obvious) addition / thought.

"Morale" is an emotional response and before someone jumps down my throat - rightly so, we are humans.

Equally, "low morale" like it or not, is a choice.

Yes, of course some people will argue "that's okay Conor but not everyone is equipped to find a way out of a dark cave" - true but ….

My point? - We are the victim of our own thinking and that works both ways.

We can choose to fight back or choose to surrender.

Let me tell you - I know - I have done both.

Yes we are all different, totally acceptable but imagine the response of an entrepreneur to "a bad situation" and the guy/girl in a rock solid safe job (if they exist anymore)

The entrepreneur faces two choices - survive or drown.

I don't like the idea of drowning so that leaves me one option.

Survive.

The non-entrepreneur faces a different choice and that will evoke a different response, thought process and outcome.

Neither 'right' neither 'wrong' I'm just fanning the flames of a very interesting question.

However, there is a small part of me that believes (some) low morale is a convenient choice and the ensuing negativity is the outcome.

As ever, my view, neither prescriptive or anything else - my view

Great debate, well done to all who contributed.

Reply by **David F. Pu'u**

I think that Conor makes a sharply keen point with the choice of path being up to the individual ultimately.

I think that in bringing this point to bear back around on Ed's question of management of morale, that this is where the pertinence of the authoring of hope should enter.

I always think in terms of the history of revolution. People will only go the direction that they ought, when it is apparent that a light exists. Hope is that light. The belief that if I go THAT way, things will be easier. In despair, they do not move. Leadership tenets 101.

The thing is, Human nature being what it is, we tend to want easy. What we should desire is better. And better for whom is the next question.

There is a lot of depth to the questions and discourse here obviously. It has me looking in the mirror.

Reply by **DennisS**

Ed - from your response, I see that this is not merely about producing fewer products or services with fewer people, but a huge change of focus and direction.

I'm currently reading, "In Pursuit of Elegance" by Matthew E. May. Chapter 3 is titled, "Seduced by Nothing", with the idea that people will seek that which appears to be missing - like filling in a Sudoko puzzle. We all have a curiosity, and this is quickly traced from Aristotle, through William James, to Daniel Berlyne in the late 1950's, a psychologist at the University of Toronto. Here the author pauses to consider the work of Berlyne more closely, finding that he divided curiosity into either "diversive (to seek out novelty, take risks, and search for adventure) or specific (natural inclination to investigate something in order to understand it)."

Berlyne determined four primary external stimuli that arouse curiosity: complexity, novelty, uncertainty, and conflict (defined as the violation of expectations). He also discovered that there's a specific trigger point for curiosity: if the level of stimulation is too low, there's no real motivation to explore; if it's too high, the result is anxiety and avoidance" (P 83). Somewhere in there is a "sweet spot" according to May. It's what I've heard explained as a healthy curiosity.

I see this as a possible direction for the ones who remain. Advise not for "maintaining morale" (which is low), but for improving morale. They will indeed go through some grieving. Some are going to feel bad to go forward (or even excel) without the others being part of it - but this is part of necessary change. And a few small celebrated successes might be quite helpful.

What I see as interesting though (and exciting), is the possibility of a change so deep that the people remaining have opportunity to be in charge of their own work and interpret ideals in their own way. They will hopefully have some motivation to be innovative, so that they keep their own jobs. They will have motivation to work as a team - across functions - in order to benefit the whole. They get the opportunity for "Creating the Change that Matters", as you beautifully posted a few days ago. http://weeklyleader.net/2009/measuring-impac/#

Intriguing to me, are the illustrations May provides regarding the flow of traffic. I've been back from India only two months now, and I got to see their almost complete lack of traffic signals. I also got to see people, scooters, cars, trucks, animal pulled carts of every kind, etc, all sharing the same space on roads. I only saw evidence of one accident in nearly three weeks there. At first it seemed like mayhem - very scary. We even had a taxi driver tell us that there are no traffic regulations at all. Drivers can drive wherever they want. Cows can go wherever they want. People can go wherever they want. So, the driver tells us three things are needed to drive there: good brakes, good horn, and good luck. But what I saw was a necessity to keep very alert as a driver - there was no safety, and no chance to be lulled to sleep thinking that everyone else who follow certain rules, as there were no written rules.

May points to the "Montana paradox", where lack of regulations as to maximum speed reduced accidents quite significantly. But when limits were once again imposed, the fatalities more than doubled. May points to the idea that better brakes should increase safety, but it has the effect of letting people think they can go faster because they can stop in a shorter distance. The most convincing illustration is that of an ice-skating rink, where there are no lanes, no signs.
It was this lack of clear expectations (within widely set boundaries) which allowed me to flourish while at Boeing. I realized this only a week ago, that the team environment, along with working across a wide range of disciplines, is something that really gets my creativity flowing. It's a much better fit for me to work on a team, than to be a solo leader. Curiosity propels me. Micro-

management stifles me. And I'll bet that the people at the company you are dealing with will also respond to opportunity to set direction.

Okay, most will probably try to "fix" what is broken - at least as their first step. Most likely it is permanently broken. So, it might be that exercises in creativity might just be what is needed to find hope right now, and to improve morale. Maybe people can be given a day off, once in a while, to read a book, with the idea of presenting a written or verbal report on what they learned to their co-workers.

In our first taxi ride in Delhi, we were quite afraid. The rules were completely different - completely missing! There was no priority given to autos. Actually, the right of way was only given to the cattle. All others had to pay attention to what was going on. This attention leads to treating each other better.

For me, it was an awareness not unlike my experience of 9/11. In this tragedy I saw something I had never seen before. The entire work force, when their shift was over, were looking each other in the eyes with a mix of emotions. Usually there was a mad dash for the crosswalks to get to cars and get home - like it was a race. But this day there was no rush to get home. There was courtesy, care, and genuine concern for others.

In the company you are dealing with, there needs to be an effort to allow for creativity and curiosity to emerge. Not just from a few stars, but from the masses. And this is going to be difficult if people are feeling overwhelmed with too much work.
I almost hate to say it, but genuine compassion at letting people go is sufficient. With those who remain, I think the statement from a TV advertisement for a nursing home could be important: "We make decisions with you, not for you."

It's going to take concerted effort by management to show that they truly care for those who remain,

as there is likely to be a level of distrust. So, eating with the employees, having an open door policy, careful listening by supervision - these are all quite important. But focusing on morale is not the way to improve it. Focusing upon it is likely to legitimize low morale, and serve to keep morale low. But looking for creativity, and rewarding it, is one way to move forward, and moving forward will improve morale.

Reply by **Richard Merrick**

Dennis - some great points here. Your description of the "violation of expectations" is very congruent with Csikszentmihalyi's work on "flow", as well as Ken Robinson's recent book "The Element".

I think the common theme it comes back to is that of clarity and responsibility for self. In my view, this is not abandonment of people, it's respect for them.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Webinar report:
Since this discussion began as a question raised by a client survey, I thought I'd report in on what transpired. There were two groups on the webinar yesterday. One a group of mentors and mentees and another committee that is focused on a specific aspect of leadership in the company. Both groups

are programs with the talent management function of the HR area of the company. There were 250 on the call yesterday.

I'll post later more of the content that I shared with them. I spoke about the issue of morale within the context of people having do more with less. That was the context, and morale is one of the symptoms of change that they are experiencing.
In the evaluations there was lots of affirmation of the company for holding this webinar. My take away is that people in corporate settings, even in the midst of lots of people, feel isolated from what is going on in the company. Being able to address the experience of people brought them together in a way that a memo could not.

A day later, I'm convinced that that the future of leadership development needs to be focus on relationship and community building within organizations. Morale is a symptom of a problem. Identifying what the specific problem is a key to managing the issues of change in our organizations now and in the future. I'll post more when I get a chance. Thanks again for your contributions.

Reply by **DennisS**

"Morale is a symptom of a problem." - I agree. People can think that the situation is "unfair" or they have difficulty finding hope (a silver lining). There's quite a bit of literature out there regarding "change management", but this may not be helpful now that they are in the midst of a quick and forced change of significant proportion.
A couple days ago I read about Lance Armstrong's preparation for repeating as winner of the Tour de France. He was out of shape, so trying to lose weight, get back in shape, eat the right foods for 6

hours of training per day, etc was just too much. He turned to a friend to help him train. He set up a schedule of more intense training for only 4 hours a day - a significant reduction. And they looked to see what was different about Lance as compared to other riders. Carmichael did the math, looking at all the variables. Lance's strength was a resting heartbeat of 32 and great oxygen uptake. They ended up with using lower gears and standing up in climbs. One early leader commented that it seemed like Lance was on a motorcycle when he went by this other rider. The new cadence on climbs meant more revolutions per minute, and reworking Lance's pedaling motion to maximize efficiency. Basically, they did higher-intensity training with a much shorter time frame. That's what I see your client as seeking. Lessons from Lance's successful training (as posited by Matthew E. May in "In Pursuit of Elegance", p116): 1) utilize the subtractive process of reducing and removing resistance (while battling the tendency to go overboard in our effort to achieve a goal - doing more and pushing harder can impede and reverse progress through overload, inconsistency, and waste), 2) optimize and maximize the expenditure of one's assets and resources (level and balance the load recognizing that doing less in one area may mean doing more in another area), 3) drastic change isn't always necessary for dramatic results (to hit a home run you don't always have to swing for the fence - you have to manage the strike zone and the bat-on-ball contact point).

I'm just starting on a chapter titled "On Sustainable Solutions", which I'm guessing will have further interesting insights and illustrations.

Reply by **DennisS**

Just read your post on Weekly Leader. (I've been out of town, and am just catching up.) Morale as a sense of control over circumstances?

At first this seemed obvious and correct. I need to reflect upon this further though, as the thought occurs to me that there are people who have absolutely no control over their circumstances (quadriplegic, heart defect, or other things that substantially place limits upon a person), yet it seems the lack of control does not affect their morale.

Perhaps it's a simple as figuring morale will suffer if the expectations and reality do not match. Nope, that's frustration, not necessarily resulting in low morale.

Morale could be reduced in the face of uncertainty. Well, that's what you were getting at with lack of control over circumstances.

Ah. Morale might well be a function of loss of direction, due to lack of trust in leadership, lack of communication regarding direction, etc.

If loss of direction is the underlying issue, then true earned leadership seems to be the answer. For this it might be necessary to even have new leaders. But this would be far from ideal. Certainly it will require trust and new vision and good communication to turn the situation around.

 Reply by **Richard Merrick**

Perhaps not "control over circumstances" as "attitude to circumstance". Something of the serenity prayer? "God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference." (part)
In any analysis - true to self.
Perhaps also shades of "pursuit of elegance" - which I now must read. Thanks Dennis.

Reply by **Conor Kenny**

Richard,
How interesting.
Take a look at my recent Blog on Triiibes, it makes that very point.
We will see you in London in the autumn for sure.
Conor.
(Well Done Ed, Super stuff - as ever)

Reply by **Richard Merrick**

Hi Conor - thanks. Sorry to be sporadic - combination of work and run up to holiday :). Some really interesting stuff going on here, well worth developing.

Reply by **David F. Pu'u**

"I'm convinced that that the future of leadership development needs to be focus on relationship and community building within organizations. Morale is a symptom of a problem. Identifying what the specific problem is a key to managing the issues of change in our organizations now and in the future."
I think you've got it completely nailed Ed.
Great analogies by DennisS

Reply by **Tom Bentley**

And for a completely different take on managing people (and morale) in the workplace, see [Managing Werewolves](#). The issues relating to office work and mores are about a third of the way down. Not that many specific remedies are touted, but the metaphors for office dealings and posturings were colorful…

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

I want to add one more visual to our discussion here. It has to do with the ways people approach change. The graphic is entitled Change Tolerance, and I used it with my clients after the webinar on Tuesday.

Here's how I describe these different attitudes toward change. The Change Phobic person is focused on maintaining security and stability. They are *Resistant to Change.*

The Change Junkie embraces the challenge and excitement of change. For them it is an adrenaline rush. They are *Resistant to Continuity and Commitment*.

The Change Adaptive person is open, pragmatic, and actively manages the connection between Risk & Opportunity. They are always *Adapting to Change*.
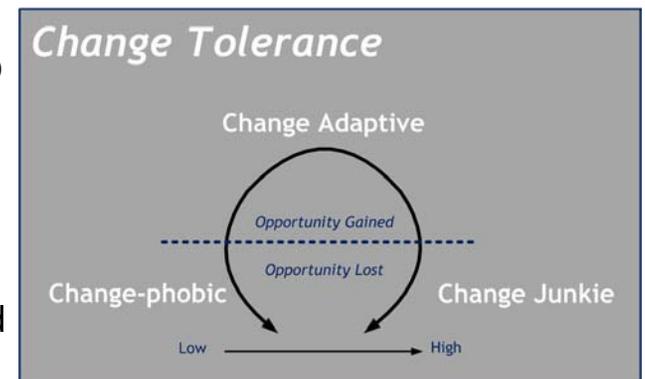
In addition, I'm suggesting that the linear spectrum of low to high tolerance functions in a context of willingness to see and adapt to the opportunities that come with change. I am saying that while there a differences in behavior between the change-phonic and change junkie, their value in meeting organizational goals may be quite similar.

In the diagram, you can replace change with risk and find the same phenomenon happening. We all know people who are risk averse or a risk junkie. Most of us, I suspect most of us fall in the middle somewhere.

I offer this image primarily to note how our personal approaches to change are factors in how morale functions in an organizational context. One of the participants in the room with me at the webinar made the comment upon seeing this image. "You can probably help the change junkie to succeed, but not the change phobic."

Do any of you know of a psychological profile instrument that measures a person's tolerance for change?
Thanks.

 Reply by **Bernd Nurnberger (CoCreatr)**

Thank you for sharing this visual, Ed. I agree the change-phobic are hardest to help. The change junkies are hard to help because they dilly-dally, change obsessively and cannot keep a course to follow a vision.

Between Change Adaptive and the junkie I would add Change Causative (Change Maker) who not only follows change to gain on the opportunities but actively creates opportunities and advantage.

I do not know of a psychological profile instrument that measures a person's tolerance for change but I figure reaction time to coherently answer a non-routine question could be a useful indicator.

Like "Excuse me, how often do you change your underwear?" ... count the time until the person either answers with what looks like an honest reply or says or does something that clearly indicates "prefer not to answer" without attacking you. Anything else, including asking "why?" adds to reaction time and is likely an insecurity (with such change) or an automaton reply covered in socially acceptable manners.
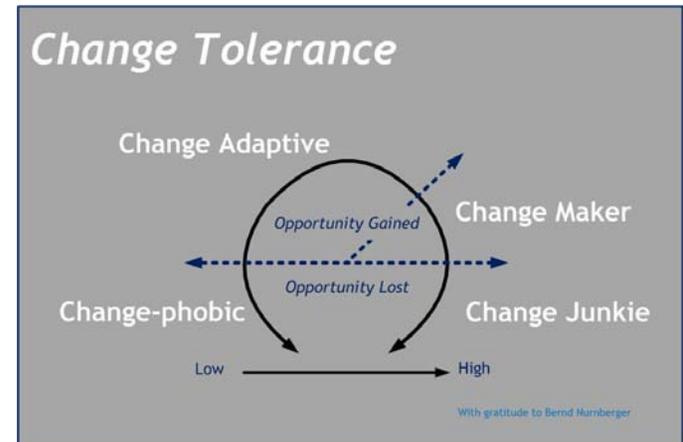
Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

I like the Change Causative. Here's my updated diagram.

This is clearly a work in progress that probably deserves its own thread. Anyone game?

Reply by **Judy Vorfeld**

I'm game, Ed. Morale is a major global issue at many levels, and business is no exception. This is very important to investigate. New thread away.

Reply by **Bernd Nurnberger (CoCreatr)**

Hey, Ed, that was fast. If others want to take it further, I'd let them ;-)
I appreciate the gratitude note, but without your name as author that looks like a bit too much of an honor. Eyeballing the sector, your contribution is 7/8 + drawing it; mine the balance.
MixedInk and Wikis are tools for drawing up texts collaboratively.
What could be a sharable drawing board?

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

The image is just an illustration for here. I'm preparing a guide like my others. It will have all my contact info on it. Thanks for expanding an idea into something better.

It really is a work in progress. My original thought was simply mark the difference between those who are effective with change, and those who are not. Your addition is forcing me to look more deeply into it.

And the real purpose is to show that the phobic and the junkie are in many ways similar, based on their impact. So, there maybe some more categories within the adaptive model that will emerge as I work on this. There may be a way to understand this based on Roger's Innovation Diffusion Model popularized in Gladwell's The Tipping Point. We'll see.
Until it gets clearer in my own head, my original version will be the one I use outside of this thread.

Reply by **DennisS**

Are you seeking to quantify and qualify people for roles in leadership (as opposed to managing what currently is)?

I could have posted immediately after the first diagram, but decided to wait since I didn't want to unduly influence the discussion. I wanted to see what others came up with. Too bad I didn't save what I started to post.

Ed, I hope you know me well enough to realize I am pushing back on some ideas - but not intending to be critical in the negative sense of the word. The intent is to communicate honestly. It seems to me there is no quantifiable thing called change tolerance - or at least no way to measure it directly. There are too many variables, as there are so many types of change. Some change cars, jobs, significant others, computers, etc. Some want to change the furniture every week, and some just want it to stay the same. But those who want to change furniture, hair style, and employer, just might be people who dig their heels in at a proposed change at church, or a friend getting engaged, or a menu change at their favorite restaurant. It just seems to be too wide a scope to suggest there are some who are more tolerant of change than others.

Maybe it would help to have a definition of what you mean by change tolerance. In what ways are you limiting this? Is it only work-related? Is it only in regard to organizations with some diversity of functions?

I think a person can much easier assess whether or not someone (or group of people) is an early

adopter of change, or even if they are at the cutting edge of change. But even then it would likely be good to keep track of whether or not they persist in the change (or as junkies, waffle frequently, as Bernd pointed out). Some change hair color and style just for attention. The only change they are seeking is in regard to relationship. It seems that relationships may actually be more an indicator of tolerance to change. The more secure a person is, the more willing they are to risk change. Then again, addictive behaviors remain - because of relationships with others who share the addiction.

There is something that hasn't been mentioned yet - with posts regarding morale or risk tolerance - and that is loss. Morale suffers when change is perceived as negative. Psychologists will tell you that all change involves loss of what used to be.

If you do find that there is a change tolerance, I wonder if those who accept change easily, and actually lead change, will be those who don't have deep relationship commitments and ties, or if the change masters (to borrow Elizabeth Moss Kanter's book title) will be the ones able to change because they have a deep and unchanging well elsewhere in their life - such as spirituality, or a strong marriage, etc. It might be interesting to find out what people think the personal characteristics are of a person who is hired to bring about change. Are these people how use their position of authority to feel in charge, but are otherwise quite insecure? Are those who are effective at leading change the ones who can gather the most trust and support?

I do think that willingness to risk, stress-level, and desire to seek something better, can all be measured. If someone has a lot of stress in their life, and no anchor to their life, then they are not likely open to change - unless the change is to remove the stress and give them something solid to hang on to.

Maybe I'm just averse to a change to measuring change tolerance. But I have a suspicion that those who have a high tolerance for change are the ones who are out there leading change, and we can simply consider whether or not someone is truly a leader (as opposed to being a manager - who doesn't color outside the lines).

Please help me understand what "change tolerance" is intended to indicate, and how it is a helpful category in its own right.

Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

Thanks for pushing back, Dennis. I'm honored. You are raising great questions that I need to think about. My inclination is that this topic needs to be its own thread. So, I'm going answer you when I crank up the next discussion in a few days.

Reply by **DennisS**

I wonder if it's hard for me to understand "change tolerance" because I live in the midst of change and find it hard to see it. This is a bit like a fish not observing the water, or humans not paying attention to the oxygen in the air.

In some places (businesses, families, etc), all that is required for change - is financial justification to convince the decision maker, and then an edict passed along to other stakeholders. Those who do not accept the change (change intolerance?) may experience another change - loss of employment. We go through so much change by the fact of living, that it's hard to imagine there are change-phobic persons.

Metathesiophobia - fear of change. "A heart full to the brim with joy and enthusiasm has no space for fear and uneasiness." "If you suffer from fear of change, you are soon to lose the taste of life." (Items in this paragraph all from: http://www.phobia-fear-release.com/fear-of-change.html

 Reply by **Ed Brenegar**

I will say this Dennis. That what provoked me to think in terms of change tolerance was an early thought about risk tolerance, following the same division between phobic, adaptive and junkie. There is a connection. Not sure I'm ready to say anything about it quite yet.
Again, thanks for the questions.

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Thank you all for your involvement.

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