

This article will tell you how to get your message through a large complex organization so that it produces not only dramatic results, but also a fundamental shift in corporate culture.

CEO: Getting Your Message Through

by Robert Hargrove

Imagine... You are the CEO of a multi-national company. You are trying to get the message through across 5 continents, umpteen different organizations, and to 250,000 people that the falling profits and market share mean we are being too complacent and that we need not only a reorganization but also a Market Driven Quality program. The troops respond with hurt feelings, outrage, and throwing it back in your face: "We don't know who you are, what you stand for, or what your vision is!" What do you do for an encore?

Imagine... You are the head of an athletic footwear/textile company which for years was number one and is now in head to head competition with two other companies who have displaced you in the American market and who are heavily attacking you on your stronghold, the European Market. You are exhorting people to get reality!! "We are getting beaten over the head by world class competition. If we want to stay in business, we have to realize that we are at war. We have to aim for the jugular, move faster, and be stronger." The managers, who hear this message at a company meeting, drive home in the plush leather seats of their BMWs and Mercedes thinking, "He should fire everyone on the executive board and then maybe we will listen to him." Where do you go from here?

Imagine... You are CEO and President of a bank that was transformed to a global custodian of pension funds under your predecessor. The bank has been racking up record profits, with an 18 percent return on assets over the past ten years. You are at the beginning of your reign and to make your mark you are trying to convince your 10 fiercely autonomous, highly successful business unit heads that the company's future lies in knocking down fences between divisions and doing more cross-selling. You have had the big meetings, gotten people's nods, and sent around the necessary memos, yet you're not sure whether anyone has heard you or not. What now?

Committed speaking and listening. In most organizations there is a great deal of speaking and listening. Yet, 99.9 percent of the speaking and listening that occurs in companies fails to make any difference. This may be OK for lesser mortals, but a CEO's message must herald significant change and bring about the introduction of a new order of things. This article is about how to have your communication as a CEO or executive fall into that 00.1% domain called "communications that make a difference," that have an impact, that break the spell of the past, alter the present, and create a new future. As a consultant to senior executives, I have noticed that most are good to excellent at

the administrative part of their jobs, some are good when it comes to dreaming up strategic visions, but few have any reality of what it takes to get a message through a large organization so that it becomes the vision, climate, spirit of the company.

The fact is that most CEO are good communicators in the conventional sense — speaking clearly and listening with understanding and empathy. Yet communication in most organizations is so commonplace that CEOs often don't realize it is a powerful and precise tool that lies within their grasp for impacting vision, culture, and bottom-line results. The article will show the CEO how to communicate to create a force field for realizing his vision, goals, and ideas. This involves interweaving the message into every aspect of the company — strategy, operating policies, employee relationships, customer interfaces — until it becomes the space in which everything that happens in the organization occurs.

Brilliant CEO's like Thomas Watson Sr., Sam Walton, and Ray Kroc had an intuitive grasp about how to do this and spend a huge amount of their time and attention on putting out some basic messages that not only became a force in people's minds and hearts, but shaped, limited, and defined everything that happened in the company. While most managers dedicate themselves to thinking about strategy and operations, exceptional CEOs realize that they have the power to create a force field when they speak and listen that can exert a powerful, subtle, and even transforming influence on employees, customers, suppliers. It has been said that architects in designing a building create a context that shapes, limits, and defines the way we live. CEOs are social architects who create a context through committed speaking, listening, and action. The idea is not only to put a message out so that people hear it or understand it, but so that it becomes self sustaining and exists independently of him as well. This is the difference between the message getting through and just having it be something you said.

Though the CEOs mentioned above are unique, the distinctions, skills, and practices that they used to tell their story and get their message through are captured in this article. Once executives grasp these distinctions, they intuitively begin to use their considerable communication skills to much greater advantage. We define "getting the message through" by the following criteria:

- The message is clear and has been communicated to all who need to hear it.
- People are able to see something in a new way as a result of the message. When people see things in a new way, they generally act in a new way.
- People change their underlying structures of thinking and behavior as a result of the message. This shows

up in the way planning is done, decisions are made, and actions are taken.

- Reality is physical. The results of the company are different and this can be measured through measurable performance criteria.

The article will provide executives with specific "how to" strategies for seeing their role in a powerful new way, getting the message through so as to create (shift) context and to actually make something happen. The answers to the questions raised here are complex. To simplify them I have decided to focus on two categories which I call "amplifying factors" and "restraining factors." Obviously, amplifying factors are factors that help get the message through; restraining factors are those that cause it to fall on deaf ears. We will start by looking at the restraining factors, which are not only numerous but also powerful and subtle. By understanding the restraining factors, it will be easier to grasp the amplifying factors and their implications

Restraining Factors

I. Company leaders come from backgrounds in finance, marketing, engineering and are not trained to be experts in human nature.

When people talk in general terms about changing the culture of a company, everybody is all for it. But when talked about in terms of changing individuals, it is much tougher. Yet, if individuals don't change, nothing changes. The ability to impact human beings doesn't come from having an MBA but out of a serious inquiry into human nature. In changing the culture, mindset, and behavior of a company, "people" issues are often pointed out to be the real issues. However company leaders are generally much more comfortable with changing organization structure. One of the reasons for this is that they have no background in it. As Lester Thurow points out in his book, *Head to Head*, most American CEOs come from backgrounds in marketing, finance, and operations. Human resource management is considered "soft" and rarely does a human resource manager become the chief executive. In Japan by contrast, it's the opposite. No

one becomes CEO without serving a stint as the human resource manager. The human resource function is not just administrative (salary and benefits), but geared to creating and maintaining a high level of alignment between the company and its people. In order to do this, one has to devote some attention to becoming a master of human nature.

While thinking about improving their function or their department might come naturally for many CEOs, the idea of communicating a message so that it becomes a force in people's minds and hearts is heady stuff. The tendency is to apply solutions to people issues that reflect their functional prejudice. Thus, when confronted with the issue of getting a new message through, they tend to apply a marketing, engineering, or financial solution that often fails to impact human beings in a real way. The finance manager tends to translate the vision into the numbers. The marketing manager tends to broadcast his message verbally, in writing, as a kind of advertisement without really taking responsibility for whether people got the message or not. The engineering manager tends to communicate the message with an emphasis on cold facts and with the idea of fixing people who don't comply. Though these may sound like stereotypes, they often hold true. You can't treat people in the same way that you treat a finance, marketing, or engineering problem. For one thing, people are full of idiosyncrasies, not the least of which is that they are not rational.

In order to communicate effectively to people you have to not only understand "what to communicate" but "who to communicating it to." The first question to ask yourself is "What are people's concerns?" People always listen to whatever a CEO says, but they are for the most part listening in terms of whether the message speaks to their concerns (fears, hopes, dreams etc.) The mistake that most CEOs make is that they speak from their own concerns, not the people's concerns, and often address these in the most superficial way: "If we don't make a profit, we will be out of business and you will lose your job." People may be influenced by such negative communications that represent what they don't want or what they are afraid, but they are more powerfully influenced by positive communications that represents a chance to realize their dreams and aspirations, and when they can sense the speakers commitment to that. The effective CEO is one who finds out what is in people's minds and hearts, speaks to peoples concerns, and at the same time, addresses the real concerns of the organization. This is one of the reasons for the success of the Total Quality movement. Everyone wants to work in a way that represents a real commitment to excellence and quality. When a company leader provides people an opportunity to do something that represents a personal calling and gives

them passion and pride, he immediately creates a powerful alignment between the purposes and goals of the individual and the purposes and goals of the organizations.

Messages consistent with human nature:

- Messages that represent an opportunity to be part of a team or to build something (an army, the great pyramids, a great organization).
- Messages that reflect a chance or opportunity to realize one's personal visions, goals, and ideas. People always listen for the opportunity in it for them to be who they always knew they could be, to do what they always wanted to do.
- Messages that speak to people's inner values. For example: justice, fairness, integrity, achievement .
- Messages that reflect positive recognition and rewards. The struggle for recognition is one of the most powerful forces in human nature and human history.

II. The message does not represent a true personal calling and is languaged in a way that does not capture people's imaginations.

Several years ago we were consulting for a company in the Midwest that made specialty chemicals. We told the big brass that the company's people were really unclear about what the vision was and that maybe they should work on that. The response of all assembled (the ten top managers in the company) was, "We would have a vision if we only followed those ten goals that we decided on at the the last planning meeting." When we asked the General Manager what those goals were, he looked at us in an embarrassed way and said, "I can't remember." Furthermore, when we looked around the room and asked others the same question, not one of the managers in the room could remember one of the ten goals that they had written down at the planning session.

This kind of situation is more common than you might expect. It points to the inability of many managers to distinguish between a vision that is a personal calling (one that is a force in people's minds and hearts) and the all too familiar vision statement. Today many companies have jumped on the bandwagon of going off for a two or three day retreat to come up with the company vision, mission statement, or plan. What often gets produced at these meetings is something

that is full of apple pie and motherhood, but not something that anyone really stands for or can be held accountable to. (The number of CEOs who supposedly had a quasi-religious conversion experience to the total quality movement must be astronomical, but the number of companies that really embody this are few and far between.) Sometimes this is a way of passing the buck, of saying, “Hey we don’t want any real change around here.” At other times, it is a clear signal that the company is merely being pushed along by the momentum of the marketplace and doesn’t know what it stands for. A frequent issue is that the organization tries to focus on too many things. “Our mission statement,” one manager told us, “was like the omelettes that we used to make in college where we dumped every spice from the pantry into the frying pan. It didn’t highlight the one or two issues that we were serious about.”

The CEO has to focus on one or two key messages (sales, profits, or whatever) if he is going to get them across—issues that are compelling, urgent, and that there is an existing readiness to do something about. He also has to language his message in a way that captures people’s imaginations and tells them what really needs to be done. An excellent example of this is when President Kennedy said in 1960, “We will put a man on the moon by the end of the decade.” This breakthrough goal is a lot different from saying, “We will be the leader in space exploration.” Yet, this is what many companies’ mission statements often sound like—“We will be the leader in customer responsiveness in our industry.” Such generic statements are all well and good, but they need to be accompanied by something that tells employees what to go to work on, or customers what to expect. One company we were involved with had a vision that was “55555.” But most of the 10,000 employees didn’t know what the numbers stood for. A large insurance company we know of had an operations plan that clearly said, “We plan to shrink and maintain profits.” Though this made sense in economic terms, in human terms it went over like a lead balloon.

In summary, one of the most important keys to getting a message through is to not only have it be a true calling but to recognize that language is fundamental. The words you choose need to be precise and effective, both in terms of setting direction, and in saying it in a way that people can relate to and find uplifting. It is also important to surround your message with drama and symbols in a way that gets attention and leaves an indelible impression on people’s minds. A few years back, Sam Walton told employees that if WalMart’s stock reached a certain number, he would dance the hula on Wall Street. It exceeded that number and he kept his promise. Finally another key element is the use of stories. These can be an excellent way to communicate the underlying

purpose of the organization or enhance the specific message you are trying to get across. There are certain incidents of breakthrough, innovation, commitment to quality, or heroic service, etc. in every organization that are just waiting to be enshrined in history.

III. Credibility gap. The CEO backs the message, but his senior managers are viewed with suspicion. They don’t walk their talk.

Get the non-players off the field. The issue in many cases is that the CEO is authentically committed to a vision and the substantive changes that will be necessary to realize it, but the executive team that reports to him are not showing up as really behind it. They may say they are a hundred percent committed and may agree in principle to the changes, but they seem to lack conviction when they put the message out, and furthermore don’t “walk their talk.” This is a very difficult issue for a CEO to deal with as it is sometimes hard to measure commitment, conviction, and behavior on an absolute scale. If you ask these people if they are committed, they will probably say “yes” and they may even be taking some action. Yet, as you walk out of their office you can feel your stomach dropping, “I don’t know if I can really count on his support.” As time goes on and projects are delayed and there is no dramatic shift in attitude or behavior, it becomes clear that you are dealing with a kind of “passive” resistance.

The situation requires that the CEO really look in the mirror at himself and his team with a strong commitment to the truth. He or she has to ask themselves, “What is my personality, what is my vision, and what kind of organization do I need to create to realize it?” In many cases, the fact of the matter is that one or more of the top management team may just not be a good fit. This doesn’t mean that they don’t perform their functional roles with excellence, or that they are not “nice” people, or that they couldn’t make a powerful contribution to some other company. It just means acknowledging that they are not a match for who you are, what your vision is, and what you want to accomplish. The result is that they will tend to only pay lip service to amplifying your message, passively back your game plan, and in effect become a non-player who clutters up the field. The only solution in this case is to acknowledge “what’s so” about the situation and to ask them to leave. The key is to replace

them with people who fit your personality, share your vision, and who will play 100% at building the kind of organization you want (not just with someone else with the same functional skills). Finding people with a match means finding those who will actively seek to get the message through, and who will actively support the change you are trying to bring about. The issue is that although most CEO's have deeply held suspicions about certain people on the executive team, they are either in denial about the situation or secretly hoping that they can bring them around. The fact is that most people don't like to have to deal with the degree of uncomfortableness involved in firing someone close to them, especially if they are performing the functional aspects of their job with a reasonable degree of competence. Still in many cases this is exactly what needs to be done and the sooner the CEO acts on his gut level instincts about it, the better off he and his organization will be.

There are several other approaches a CEO can take to deal with this situation starting with putting the issues on the table that everyone else is avoiding. For example, although everyone in an organization may agree intellectually that going from a functionally driven to a process driven organization may be a good idea, when it comes time to actually implementing the change, it means people have to give up some of their sacred control ground. Though everyone has agreed on paper, it's obvious that the voluntary, emotional commitment to move to this new kind of consolidated organization just might not be there. It's the CEO's job to dig below the superficial level of agreement and get the issues on the table that are of concern to people, even through they may mean speaking plainly about how the change affects people's self interest. (The motivation of many managers on a high level in companies is not money but power, and no one likes losing it). The CEO must not only get the issues on the table, he must stop at any point in the process and have the tough conversations where there is likely to be healthy disagreement.

The idea is to engage in a dialogue where the purpose is not just to argue for one's point of view, but for the individual and the group as a whole to learn something. For this to happen, we need to stop looking at opposition as something to crush and begin to embrace it as a necessary part of company transformation. Engaging in the give and take of dialogue, with a good facilitator to assist, is an opportunity to reduce friction and gain valuable information that allows you to correct your course and transform beliefs. In this way, opposition can be used to clarify your message, win converts, and even gain momentum. As opposition is usually a sign that someone or something is being left behind, it's important to acknowledge and honor what people may have to give up in order to make the transition to the future. Acknowledging this

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- III. Credibility gap. The CEO backs the message, but his senior managers are viewed with suspicion. They don't walk their talk.**
- IV. The goals, objectives, and reward system are out of alignment with the message that the executive is trying to get across.**
- V. There is often a massive resignation or giving up in the company, that makes it difficult or impossible to communicate any new message.**
- VI. Talking change, but staying in the comfort zone.**
- VII. Company leaders underestimate the degree of difficulty involved in communicating a new message and tend to give up early when confronted with the reality of what it takes.**

makes it easier for people to let go. At some point in this dialogue it's important that the CEO simply ask for support: "Will you back me? Will you support me?" This kind of personal appeal that cuts below the intellectual level can be astonishingly powerful. The request for backing should be followed by other explicit requests that involve implementing the CEO's strategy, e.g. "Keep putting the message out there until it

changes the way we do business.” On a concrete level, one way to get the ball rolling is to create a near-term objective based on the issues, making it clear who will do what, by when. By monitoring this tightly, a CEO can do a lot to move people through their considerations and push the project along. As actions often speak louder than words, this can go along way toward closing the credibility gap.

IV. The goals, objectives, and reward system are out of alignment with the message that the executive is trying to get across.

It’s been said that an organization is as powerful as it is in alignment. Our definition of alignment is the degree to which an organization truly functions as a whole. For this to happen, strategy, structure, systems together with goals, plans, and, most importantly, people have to be aligned. Another crucial factor is the performance measurement and reward system. It is the leader’s chief responsibility to create alignment between these critical factors, and this must happen by design rather than by accident. This has a big impact on whether or not a message gets through an organization.

A recent experience with a Fortune 500 client, who made products for industrial distribution, illustrates what happens when these factors are out of alignment. The CEO, at the beginning of his term, took a stand for two things: “Total Quality” and a 30% fixed cost reduction. He went all around the world driving home the message of finding opportunities in change and Total Quality. Everyone agreed to these noble goals, but people were expected to implement these against a background of the cost reduction that was to take place within one year. Though the total quality initiative would be a difficult order to implement on its own, the reward system actually worked against it. The division general managers were having their performance measured on sales, profits, and cost reduction. There was no measurement of total quality implementation, and engineers who would have normally been responsible for quality were fired as part of the restructuring process. Thus when push came to shove and defective products showed up, the order passed down to the distribution center was “ship it.” The result was that the CEO had communicated a positive message successfully, yet because the organization was not aligned in terms of goals, performance mea-

asures, and rewards, the result was that the message produced a great deal of cynicism.

As Paul Allaire said in a recent interview in the Harvard Business Review, “One of the things I learned a long time ago is that if you talk about change and you leave the reward and recognition system exactly the same, nothing changes.” People quite rationally say, “I hear what he is saying, but it’s not what I get paid to do or what I get promoted for. So what’s in it for me?” A similar scenario could be built for any of the other key factors that a CEO must align.

V. There is often a massive degree of resignation or giving up in the company, that makes it difficult or impossible to communicate any new message.

“Le plus ça change, le plus ça rest même chose.” In the past ten years, company employees have been awash with change programs of every conceivable description. From quality circles to restructuring, from participative management to re-engineering, and from encouraging team work and interdepartmental cooperation to highly autonomous profit centers. Yet in many cases, the more things change, the more they stay the same. Management doesn’t change its ways, the results often don’t improve, and people often become cynical and demoralized as a result. This is compounded by that fact that somehow we have created a corporate culture and underlying management system that, for all the thinly veiled new age pretenses, is autocratic, bureaucratic, and deadening to the human spirit. As one middle manager told us, “People feel betrayed by leaders who do not help them realize their goal and by an organization that does not help them realize their potential.”

Our experience in company after company would lead us to conclude that in most organizations there is a massive degree of resignation that most company leaders are hardly aware of when they leave their office to talk about the latest change effort. Ask people about the company’s market position, new product development effort, MRPII implementation process, and you are likely to get an earful of comments like, “The company is like a 747 without a pilot,” “The company is focused on turf wars, not the competition,” “Nothing will change until management changes,” “The last time I tried to make a con-

structive suggestion, I was hit in the knees with a lead pipe.” “Quality is like the flavor of the month, this too shall pass,” “Make a difference in my job? Why bother?” When a CEO goes out to meet with the troops and deliver his message, he is literally walking into a “minefield” that is likely to blow up in his face. These are the background conversations that are reverberating in the hallways, behind closed doors, and at hotel room bull sessions during the annual company meeting.

Employees listen to what the boss has to say from a structure of listening (or set of filters) that leaves very little room for them to really absorb his message and that often distorts it. In fact, it’s worse than that; people who are resigned tend to collect evidence for their point of view and treat anything that is not consistent with their point of view with outright hostility. What’s needed is not more inspirational appeals, persuasive arguments, facts, or information but to interact with people in a way that alters their underlying structure of listening and leaves them open to receiving your message. Engaging employees or groups of employees in a dialogue is an excellent way to do this, providing the CEO a chance to deliver his message and the employees an opportunity to express themselves. The key to the success of your communication may paradoxically lie not in how well you say it, but in how well you listen to what is on the minds of managers and employees. This is often difficult for CEOs who tend to think that their thoughts are more important than anyone else’s, have built in prejudices about “marketing” or “manufacturing,” and feel that the other people in the company “just don’t understand.” Keep in mind that you are not only there to help people “get things off their chest,” but to help them shift the underlying point of view that reinforces it. If you listen closely, you will discover that behind what people are saying are “get out strategies,” “give up strategies,” or “get up strategies” (promotions). Once you listen for a long time, you will be able to respond intelligently, addressing not only what people are saying, but the emotions behind it. As one CEO said, “If you have given up, you automatically forfeit your ability to change the situations you are upset about, no matter how unreasonable you think the situation is.”

If you, as a CEO take a stand that a difference can be made and if you can take responsibility for how it has been in the company up until this point (good, bad, or indifferent), you can break the grip of resignation and unleash the human spirit into action. Remember, in this process there is a dance between enrolling people in your ideas and listening to what they have to say. Being a committed speaker and listener means that you stay at it until there is a shift in mindset, attitude and behavior.

Note: Success breeds resignation too. Though resignation is frequently a symptom of poor company

performance, cutbacks, thwarted attempts at positive change, or treating people without dignity or respect, there is a reverse variety that you see in companies that are fat, dumb, and happy. It is often just as difficult to get a message through a company that has been highly successful, as managers point to their outstanding results and say “We don’t need to change anything.” In reality these people are resting on their laurels and have in fact “given up” because they don’t have any idea how to take the company to the next level.

VI. Talking change, but staying in the comfort zone.

Experience shows us that in implementing change many executives paralyze their organization by being more committed to staying in the comfort zone than they are committed to change. In so doing, they often fail to generate enough actions and decisions to generate momentum, to actually make anything happen. The typical scenario in any change process is to go through an endless process of consensus testing that would make the backroom intrigue rival the Medici court. This is usually followed by an interminable “gearing up phase” of planning, analysis, and elaborate preparations. Then when everyone gets frustrated and says, “We need to take some actions,” the actual level of demand making on people is very low. (This includes what people demand of themselves as well as what they demand of others.) For example, when we asked a General Manager of a large European pharmaceutical company about the fact that his implementation of MRPII (manufacturing resource planning) was 6 six months to a year behind, he responded somewhat defensively that all of his business unit managers were “for the implementation or at least not against it.” When we asked him further what he was doing to create a sense of urgency around the project, he said, “we are taking small steps” and that many of these would lead to the objective. The small step approach, which usually follows a path of many convoluted, political detours, while perhaps being easy to swallow often results in the manager losing his credibility or the people losing interest. Instead of the conversation being about “what can be done to move the change process forward,” it becomes about “whether management really supports it or not.”

In our view, if the executive wants to get his message through, he has to find appropriate ways to bypass office politics, shorten the gearing up phase by focusing on producing some near term results, and increase the level of demand making on people. Al-

though people like to stay with what is safe, comfortable, and familiar, they often jump at the opportunity of a challenge when they are presented with one. Our experience is that a breakthrough in organization excellence is not possible without risk, and people respond to risk with inspiration, commitment, enthusiasm. These ideas may be useful: **Challenge.** Motivate people by showing that you believe in who they are and what they are capable of. *“You are capable of achieving much higher results. I am confident that you can do it. I expect much more from you.”* **Confront with support.** Be clear about what results will be required and be specific. Let people know you are available to support them. *“This is exactly what I want you to do. You have two days to do it. Remember, I’m here if you need me.”* **Hold people accountable.** *“This is what you and your group agreed to be accountable for. The results that are showing up are not on track with that. Remember you either have the reasons or you have the results.”*

VII. Company leaders underestimate the degree of difficulty involved in communicating a new message and tend to give up early when confronted with the reality of what it takes.

“But I told them three times !!!” These were the words of a former CEO and client of ours as he sat back at his big desk and leather chair, exasperated by why the troops had not fallen in line with the idea of zero-based budgeting. The troops hadn’t fallen in line, it turns out, because they didn’t really know what he expected. Several weeks later we read in the Wall Street Journal a quotation by Ren MacPherson, former chairman of the Dana Corporation, who said that “by the time I tell them 34 times, they start to listen a little.” The contrast between these two statements seemed to sum up the discrepancy between the perception of what it takes to get a message through a large complex organization and the reality. The fact is that communicating a message that heralds organization change and demands that people break out of old patterns is often not a part time job, but a full time job. Unfortunately this doesn’t fit the rules and regulations of CEOs and executives who have been trained to think of themselves as administrators who sit behind their big desks, looking at reports and holding meetings. There is a slot in most executive’s minds that says, “I

Amplifying Factors

- I. **See all of your communications in terms of creating a context—one that becomes the vision, culture, and spirit of the company.**
- II. **Generate a “new” conversation that moves people beyond fear and the comfort zone, eliciting their commitment to make a difference, to bring forth a breakthrough.**
- III. **New conversations are based on a big idea that shape products, services, and organization processes.**
- IV. **Your speaking and listening can make a difference when you dare to take a stand.**
- V. **Spearhead a breakthrough—identify the leverage points where small actions can radiate throughout the system and produce big results.**
- VI. **An idea picks up force and speed to the extent that it is translated into action. Go for a result now!**
- VII. **Make a rigorous, active, inquiry into the organization’s issues that will make your message sustainable once it’s delivered, understood and acted upon.**

am a strategist,” another that says, “I am the guardian of operations,” another that says, “My job is to keep shareholders happy.” “Yet, there is often no slot for the CEO as chief communicator,” says Roddy Campbell, President of Pony International.

Perhaps it’s time to start thinking about “communication” in a different way—not simply as describing the situation like a company report, or wasting time in meetings, but as a vehicle of creation and generation. The CEO’s communication, his speaking and listening, needs to be viewed like the chisel of the carver, a tool by which he or she creates the future of the organization. This cannot simply be achieved by

royal appearances or such minimal efforts as sending a memo out to all managers on the new strategy, or a kick off meeting for the new quality program. It takes disciplined intensity, grinding it out day after day in your company's far flung regions and in the smallest of places, knowing full well that people are likely to hear everything you are saying with a dose of healthy and even unhealthy skepticism.

If you are a CEO, your job is to speak and listen and then to speak and listen some more, adjusting your speaking and your listening until people begin to see things in a new way, act in a new way. The objective is to not only make something happen through executive decree, but also to make sure that your communication exists independently of you. This requires a willingness to take tough stands, to draw out people who will be intimidated by you, and to listen to complaints about the organization that will make you see the inside. This type of communication isn't a one time event but a process. Whatever happens, whether people agree, disagree, like you or dislike you, participate or withhold, you have to hold all that in your mind as all part of the process and use it to get where you are going.

Amplifying Factors

I. See your communication as a leader in terms of creating a context—a context that becomes the vision, climate, spirit of the company.

Max DePree, former Chairman of Herman Miller, said in his book, *The Art of Leadership*, that a leader's number one responsibility is to define "reality." This not only involves accurately interpreting the business environment, coming up with the right strategy, and setting limits, it also involves communicating the governing ideas—the purpose, vision, and values by which people live. This involves using language to create a structure of interpretation for people coming into the organization that helps them determine what to hold as important, what to go to work on, and how to interact. Though they may have had different words for it, the business geniuses of this century, such as Thomas J. Watson, General Johnson, and Walt Disney, realized that the real purpose of executive communication is not only being understood, making decisions and causing action but also creating a context. At IBM

the message was "think," at Johnson and Johnson it was "unfailing responsibility to doctors, nurses, and patients," at Disney "every person is called a guest with a capital 'G.'" These institutions became great not because these governing ideas were inscribed on bronze plaques or office posters and forgotten, but because these leaders used them to shape, limit and define every aspect of the company. Though the context of a company is largely unseen, it is felt and has a direct and immediate impact on innovative ideas, productivity, morale, and profits. When Air Force General Bill Creech arrived at TAC, he found that the pilots were complaining about the state of repair of the planes and sorties were at an all time low. Instead of indulging in scowls, finger pointing, and fear tactics he motivated, celebrated, and virtually canonized the support people in all of his communications. "The airplane is our customer," he said. He made heroes out of people whose mundane chores contributed to getting the planes up in the air.

If we liken "context" to a bowl and "content" to what's inside the bowl, many managers tend to concern themselves with re-arranging the content—such as fiddling with the strategy, structure, and systems, as if that were an end in itself. Real leaders intuitively recognize that the greatest opportunity to impact their organization is to create a context that becomes the vision, climate, spirit of the company. As a president of a high tech company once told us, "I'll tell you how to create a great marketing organization. It has to do with creating an atmosphere in the company where the man or woman on the loading dock decides not to drop the damned box into the back of the truck." Though generating a context may seem like soft stuff when compared to the yearly plan, budget, and performance reviews, this software is what more often than not determines whether there will be hard results. What often escapes many managers as they go through their normal routine is the context they are unconsciously creating through their speaking, listening, and actions. Of this you can be certain: your organization always fulfills the context that you create for it—good, bad, or indifferent. The issue is often how to create a shift in context, given what you have created in the past or inherited from your predecessor. When Jack Welch became CEO of GE, he sold off businesses, cut costs to the bone, and fired a lot of people, earning himself the nickname of "Neutron Jack." In so doing, he created a context where people pulled in their horns, headed for the bunkers, and waited for the next bomb to drop. Since that time, he has been trying to create a shift in context—a context of leadership, risk taking, and worker empowerment. Creating a shift in context involves speaking and listening with the intention of inspiring, empowering, and enabling people to see things in a new way. When people see things differently, they act differently. This involves using even

routine occasions (frequent, informal, face-to-face communications) to interact with people on such issues as being innovative, or creating more cross-functional teamwork, or reducing costs. When a critical mass of people begin to see things in a new way and act in a new way, a shift in context will occur and people, events, and circumstances will begin to move into alignment with the context that you are creating.

To create a shift in context that becomes a force field in your company:

1. **Label the existing context. (E.g. business as usual)**
2. **Understand the consequences of the existing context in terms of what it gives rise to.**
3. **Create a new context consistent with your vision and change — speed, quality, and service.**
4. **Look for opportunities to get the message through while weaving it into strategy, operating policy.**
5. **Take bold and unreasonable action when called for to let people know that you are serious.**

II. The power of a new conversation.

Executives are often engaged in the work of transformation, setting the strategic vision, establishing the core values, giving substance to a network of primary beliefs. The single most powerful vehicle through which an executive accomplishes this is language. Though most executives may not often recognize it, one of the most powerful factors in being able to shape, limit, and define the future of their organization is through their speaking and listening. Said another way, speaking and listening are so common- place that we often fail to recognize how vital they are, how important it is to use them purposefully, and how we actually have, within our grasp, a precise and effective tool to shape the world around us. As Hegel once said, *“While our speaking and listening are often thought to merely represent things, they are actually like the chisel of the carver, they have the power to free an idea from the general formlessness of the outside and call it forth in reality.”*

Generating a new conversation involves using the forwarding force of an idea to bring about the introduction of a new order of things or to alter a point of view or habit. This is the most powerful means we know of in creating a shift in context and bringing about the introduction of a new order of things. Before the Declaration of Independence, human rights did not really exist. Yet, consider the proposition, “all men

are created equal and they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, amongst these life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” These words generated a conversation, or rather a network of conversations, that became a force in people’s minds and hearts, a force that changed half the world. We can see from this example that generating a “new” conversation can be used to bring about the introduction of a new order of things, and it is a potent and direct form of action. As most people in organizations tend to wait on the CEO’s every word, it may in fact be of much greater significance as a management technology than a staff, plan, and budget which is what the executive is usually focused on.

Our research indicates that an executive shapes his organization not just through the formal strategy statement, but more significantly through the numerous informal conversations that he has with people every day. The idea is to recognize each and every one of these occasions as an opportunity to make a difference, keeping in mind what a wise man once said, “As a man speaks, not only is his language in a state of birth, but also the very thing about which he is talking.” In this vein, if we look at the companies that have been most successful in the past decade or so, their success may to a large extent be more a function of the ability of their leaders to generate a “new” conversation than because of the traditional things leaders do. Steve Jobs of Apple redefined the market place when he made the distinction of “the world’s first intuitive computer.” John Watts of AT&T came up with the idea of the fax machine and transformed business communications. Fred Smith of Federal Express declared that his company would deliver packages within 24 hours and brought to mind visions of the Pony Express.

What CEOs need to recognize is that because they have the power to speak and listen, they have the power to make a difference. That is to say, they have the power through their speaking and listening to generate a conversation that creates a future that is not merely a projection of the past. All too often what keeps companies trapped in the past is getting in the same “old” conversation that may have worked in the past, but no longer does. For example, the old conversation that Americans were more interested in cars with big fins and spacey taillights, than they were in quality, cost US car manufacturers a huge chunk of the auto market. To generate a new conversation, the idea is to keep putting out your message so that it is more than a good idea, and so that it not only exists in your speaking and listening but independently of you as well. As was clearly demonstrated by former CEO John Pederson of Ford Motor who spent almost every day for two years preaching “Quality is Job 1,” the power of a new conversation can play a vital role in breaking the grip of old paradigms and habits. This was not just mere sloganeering, but resulted in a whole

One way of looking at the organization is as a conversation or network of conversations that shape, limit, and define the strategy, structures, and systems, as well as the mindset, attitude, and behavior. Transforming a company requires breaking the grip of the “old” conversation and generating a “new” conversation through committed speaking and listening. This requires that we distinguish the difference between “old” and “new” conversations.

Old Conversations	New Conversations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Obsolete answers to the question “What business are we in?” ■ Conversations that reinforce the old paradigm, management system, attitude/ behavior. ■ Conversations that reinforce old products, product cycles and ways of doing things. ■ Conversations that don’t forward the action, i.e. conversations of mere opinion. ■ Conversations that express a cynical attitude based on evidence from the past. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Conversations that set a new direction and become the vision, climate, spirit of the company. ■ Provide the answers to what’s missing in the company or market place that could make a difference. ■ Conversations that introduce new possibilities, create new market niches and powerful new product cycles. ■ Conversations that generate a whole new mindset, attitude, behavior, and that forward the action. ■ Conversations that leave people feeling inspired and empowered.

new mindset—Team Taurus—and dramatically different ways of working.

The question of how to go about generating a new conversation is a complex one, considering that it’s hard for companies to get over their history. **Yet, there are some things that are relatively simple to keep in mind:** **1. Clarity is power.** The clearer, simpler, and more thought provoking your message is, the more likely it is that it will get through. **2. Shift from monologue to dialogue.** When you ask people what they think, they get involved. The idea is to interact with people in a way that allows everyone to see something they didn’t see before. **3. Don’t indulge yourself in old conversations** about how discouragingly complex the situation is or about how other people and departments have screwed up. **4. Discipline yourself to speak and listen from a commitment** to enrolling people in your ideas, to empowering and enabling others to forwarding the action. **5. Use generative language**—not “I hope,” “I’ll try”, “that’s a definite maybe.” As T. J. Austin said in his book How to Do Things with Words, leaders must speak in the lan-

guage of performatives, language that defines what’s possible, achievable and makes something happen.

A new conversation is generated by certain kinds of language that we can place in five categories:

- **Declarations.** Declare new possibilities as open. “We declare these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal.”
- **Commissives.** Commit the speaker to some future course of action. “We will put a man on the moon by the end of the decade.”
- **Expressives.** Use words that are human and get to the human being in those you are speaking to. These are words that add meaning and emotion to the message. “I am very proud of our new customer satisfaction program and I want to tell you what it means to me.”
- **Assertives.** Commit the speaker to something being the case, without immediate proof or evidence. “We will be a company that is number 1 in our field within five years.”
- **Directives.** Attempt to get the listener to do something. This includes demand making.

III. New conversations are based on a big idea that has the power to make the listener rock back in his chair.

“Ideas are themselves substantive entities which like food, vaccines, and DNA have the power to influence and transform human life.” Dr. Jonas Salk. The ability to get one’s message through is less a function of being a brilliant public speaker, than having a bold inventive and effective idea that shakes people out of the reality in which they are lodged. A big idea expressed in plain language has authentic communicative power, not only because it catches people by surprise, but because it has the power to change an existing point of view or habit. The appeal of any big idea is that it offers people an exciting new possibility, a live opportunity to advance, or solves a bothersome issue and problem. The personal computer, fax machine, and total quality movement are all examples of this.

The genuinely talented executive must be armed with the attitude, with the unshakable belief that the bothersome issues and problems his organization faces embody a big idea—a surprising solution, an idea that can be communicated with a simple, stunning imagery and richness of meaning. Yet all too often, instead of embracing the heart of the problem and searching for an exciting, thrilling, breakthrough solution, company leaders revert to the same patent remedies “hire and fire,” “cut costs to the bone,” “break up the company into autonomous divisions.” In effect, what they are doing is following the rules. Though this may be useful and ultimately necessary, what is really required in many cases is unconstipated thinking. The companies that have rocketed to success in recent years were not based on linear, logical, formulaic thinking taught at many business schools but by inquiring into problems, blending together emerging concepts in people’s minds, and coming up with a brilliant flash of the obvious. This is how CEO Scott McNeally, of Sun Microsystems, came up with the idea of open systems and created one of the fastest growing success stories in American industry. This is how Les Wexner came up with the idea of The Gap and The Limited, based on warm armpit marketing and bringing products from concept to market in one month rather than the traditional six. And this is how Nucor Steel came up with the idea of rolling process mills rather than the traditional foundries.

These are examples of leadership commitment and communication that produced commitment, passion, and zeal from followers, rather than the usual “ho

hum,” or “let’s wait until the next shoe drops.” The question inevitably arises, “How does one come up with a big idea out of the clear blue sky?” The answer to the question is not by snapping one’s fingers and saying “Alacazam,” but by cultivating new ways of thinking and doing. Company leaders have to start to see themselves outside of their administrative roles and start to see themselves as a source of creativity and imagination. **This can come in a variety of ways:**

- 1. By reflection and inquiry.** CEOs are often so busy thinking in terms of company politics, the planning process, budget reviews that they often don’t nurture the skill of reflection and inquiry. The company’s number one problem should be looked at as a question to be reflected on and inquired into until you have a moment of true insight, not as grist for the mill of standard operating procedures.
- 2. Listening to new good ideas throughout the organization.** This can come from engaging people in a dialogue where the object of communication is to learn rather than in a discussion where the object of communication is to win points in an argument. The objective of the dialogue might be to acknowledge that no matter how difficult or impossible the problem may seem on the surface there is a big powerful new idea that can solve it.
- 3. By reading disparate magazines and books that allow for a cross fertilization of ideas.** As advertising genius George Lois, who came up with the idea of “Lean Cuisine” comments, “I read because I have an insatiable hunger to see, hear, taste, and experience as much stimuli as my mind and body can absorb.” The biggest sin that many CEOs commit is not that they don’t run a tight ship, it’s that they don’t read. Reading often results in putting one idea together with another over time until a synthesis is created that has some world shaking capacity.

Another thing to keep in mind when thinking in terms of generating a new conversation based on a big, powerful, attractive, new idea, is the impact of a big idea on how other people speak and listen. People generally have a structure of listening that filters in certain communications and filters out others. To draw an analogy, people put those communications that are filtered out in “Pile B.” Those communications that are filtered in are put in “Pile A.” “Pile B” consists of junk mail, politically derived promises, executive communications that talk change but are really hot air. In “Pile A” go personal communications, opportunities for personal growth or advancement, and big new ideas that solve practical and immediate problems. Effective communication is about consciously and intentionally designing, packaging, and delivering your message so that it falls into “Pile A.” In the meantime, keep these thoughts in mind: a big idea can transform our language, start or save a business, change popular culture, turn the world upside down.

IV. Your speaking and listening can make a difference when you dare to take a stand.

“I am of the impression that nine out of ten cases that I deal with are windbags, who do not speak in a way where they take anything upon themselves. From a human point of view, their ideas and opinions do not move me very profoundly. However, it is immensely moving when a mature man ...acts by following the ethic of reasonability and somewhere reaches the point where he says here is where I stand; I can do no other.” Max Weber

If you want to generate a new conversation and have a big idea or two in the offing, keep in mind that no one listens for very long to someone with ideas and opinions who never takes a stand, who never really enters the arena, and who never really takes any actions. It has been said that nothing is as powerful as a good idea whose time has finally come. Yet consider that what it is that makes an idea’s time come is one individual standing behind it. This is often not the case in most companies where there are generally lots of ideas, opinions, and experts, but few people willing to step up to the plate. The phenomena of an individual taking a stand that a difference can be made and being willing to crawl out on a limb, to bring forth a breakthrough is generally a rarity. All too frequently organization life is about being a politician, negotiator, and compromiser. To succeed people tend to accommodate themselves to the need to look good, play it safe, and do whatever the situation demands.

The fact is however that the only time something of any significance ever really changes is when someone takes a stand. This does not mean becoming a dictator, issuing ultimatums, or banging your shoe on the table. It means speaking, listening, and taking action from a commitment that a difference can be made, from embracing a possibility that taking a stand has allowed you to see. It means once a CEO takes a stand and enrolls his colleagues, that stand must be something that is non-negotiable—the flexibility not in the “what” or “by when,” but in the “how.” It means living as your word rather than your desires, moods, and the dictates of circumstance. Commitments made in this way have a much greater promise of achievement than mere hopes, wishes, and dreams.

People who take a stand not only make a commitment that indicates their vision, goals, and intended course of action; they are taking a stand in a way in which their identity shifts from their position to what

they are standing for. When we think of Lee Iacocca, Jack Welch, and W.Edwards Demming, we discover that who these men are and what they stand for is inseparable. Leaders who speak, listen, and act from a stand, stand out not only for their ideas but for their authenticity and believability. They are people that their followers can point to and say “this man (or woman) commands my respect.” This is a lot different from those who jump on the bandwagon of the latest trend and those that don’t walk their talk or send conflicting messages. Taking a stand doesn’t always have to be something dramatic but can simply be about letting people know where you stand on various issues without waffling from one day to the next.

It is important to keep in mind that when you take a stand, it is not about putting up a brick wall and becoming rigid and dogmatic in your point of view. It is about having the willingness to “embrace the enemy” and have the tough conversations coming from your stand—a commitment to live as your word. It is about learning how to speak and listen to people in a way that elicits their voluntary emotional commitment rather than trying to convince them through force of argument or pressure. You will find that when you speak and listen with this intention, commonplace meetings and routine events take on unexpected power and potency. You will not only discover a shift in the way you converse with others, but in the way you “are” in the communication. You will have greater access to relationships, accomplishment, and satisfaction. And you will find that you draw out of others the same commitment-based, action-oriented, no-nonsense communication.

V. Spearhead a breakthrough—creating a structure for fulfillment for your commitments and conversations.

For many executives the ability to generate a new conversation is brought forward by emerging issues and opportunities. Thus, the greater the speed with which we create visions, goals, and ideas, the more there is a need to manage our commitments and conversations. That is to say, the more there is a need to make our dreams come true, the more urgent the need for a structure for fulfillment by which we can accomplish this. A structure for fulfillment is designed to ground and give substance to the possibilities that we have called forth. The idea here is to use your communication to create such a structure for fulfillment,

whether it takes the form of a goal, concrete plan, or set of actions. While people may express genuine understanding of your message, as well as commitment and the desire for involvement, they may be lacking a reliable pathway to accomplish them. This structure works like a road map—a direct route to generating appropriate and effective action. Let's look at some examples: John Akers got the idea that IBM had become too big and bloated and that it was time to do things in a more entrepreneurial way. He asked each of his senior executives on the management committee to be accountable for a breakthrough goal for the company and their own area. At the same time, he broke the company up into autonomous divisions and may even sell stock in pieces. He also introduced a market driven quality program. This became the structure for fulfillment.

Often company leaders fall victim to the programmatic fallacy where they transfer responsibility for coming up with a transformative idea and creating a structure of fulfillment to a packaged change program. To use a general example, we can look at recent management trends such as total quality, participative management, and worker empowerment. The company leaders who implement these programs often come up with some general goals like, "Excellence through innovation," or "Continuous improvement in everything we do." Even "talk back to the boss." Often to give these projects some form and substance, employees are expected to carry out projects and to translate ideas into concrete actions. This is all positive, yet without a common goal that everyone is shooting for, management direction, and real accountability, the effort tends to get dispersed. "Everyone in the company was expected to have their own total quality project. The problem was that we had so many projects, that the whole effort lost focus and it was difficult to demonstrate any bottom-line results."

OK, whatever your idea is for your company, you probably don't want to go through the kind of monumental changes taking place at IBM, or for that matter General Motors, and you probably don't want to get involved in "just another program." One approach we have found in our work for getting a message through while at the same time creating a structure of fulfillment is to spearhead a breakthrough in an area of the company, where accomplishing something significant could provide the opening or opportunity for the whole company to move a huge step forward. The idea of a spearhead is that it is one pointed and powerful—in other words you don't have to take your company apart and put it back together again. What is necessary is to look for a leverage point where a small change can radiate throughout the system and make a big difference. The starting point is to look at what the message is that you are really trying to get across, and then to ask yourself what would be different if you were

successful. Is there an area where spearheading a breakthrough—in design, marketing, production—would not only help to get the message across, but act as a catalyst for people to begin to think, plan, and act in a new way?

These additional guidelines may be useful:

- 1. Start by enrolling your management group in your big idea. If people oppose you, embrace their objections as an opportunity for a real conversation.**
- 2. Set a breakthrough goal based on current resources and authority.**
- 3. Create a set of "mandates" that represent key issues involved—what really needs to be accomplished for the breakthrough goal to be realized.**
- 4. Ask each manager from the various departments of your organization to sign a contract regarding what they will accomplish, with specific measurable criteria and performance consequences.**
- 5. Immediately start focusing on what you can do right now.**

VI. An idea picks up force and speed to the extent that it is translated into action. Go for a result now!

One of the key issues that beset most organizations is that the situations often appear so discouragingly complex that people don't take action. Thus, when the executive delivers his message, people tend to hear it through any number of filters such as, "I'll do this after it's clear who is going to be our next CEO," or "It's a good idea, but it can't happen under this organization structure and without a single sales force," or "I am in the same church, in the same pew with you—just give me more people and budget." The litany of give me something "more, different, better" invariably expressed with righteous indignation goes on and on. Against these background conversations, it is up to the CEO and his team to not only get his message across but to forward the action.

The problem is that people don't act until there is a climate. Creating a climate that calls for action doesn't start with soul searching, dealing with "touchy-feely issues," or getting side tracked into an attitude survey. It starts with distinguishing three different kinds of conversations. First of all there are conversations of mere facts and opinion. For the most part, people

spend the majority of their time indulging in these conversations. Secondly there are conversations for possibility, those that fuel visions of a new future. Finally there are conversations for action. Once the big idea, breakthrough goal, etc. are set, it is up to the leaders to generate a conversation for action that brings out the best in people and actually makes something happen. This isn't as difficult as it might appear. A key point to deal with is that it's not a perfect universe and we have to work with what we have. Generating a conversation for action involves asking people questions like the following: "What can you do now to get this message across and accomplish something around it, within your present resources and authority?" "Where can we produce a success in the next 2-4 weeks to generate some momentum?" "What can you do right now! Immediately! to get the ball rolling?"

A structure of fulfillment in line with these questions is the "planned breakthrough project." This basically involves working off a breakthrough goal (or major objective). The idea is to create a widening circle of quick successes and create a rallying momentum which results in new management confidence and new management skills.

Some criteria for a planned breakthrough project are as follows:

- 1. Focus on bottom-line results. What is urgent and compelling?**
- 2. Exploit existing readiness. (Don't try to create new readiness.) What really needs to be done that everybody wants to get on with ASAP?**
- 3. Success must be near and clear. The objective of the small breakthrough project is to be accomplished in weeks, not months.**
- 4. Play by the ground rules of staying within current resources and authority.**
- 5. Build on a widening circle of successes. Initial results create new openings for action.**

VII. Make a rigorous, active inquiry into the organization's issues that will make your message sustainable, once it's delivered, understood, and acted upon.

There is an old Japanese saying that what has a

front has a back, and the bigger the front the bigger the back. This applies to most management nostrums as well as to much of what has been said here. No matter how well something works on the front, there is usually a big back side to it. The difference between a highly effective CEO and a not so effective one is that the effective one takes time to think about front and back. For example, a high tech company that we know started a total quality program. The program was so successful that they eliminated many defects, improved work processes, and set higher improvement goals. The back side was that it worked so well that it resulted in over 150 people being terminated. The following year the employees became so frightened of the quality program that they virtually abandoned everything and anything that had something to do with it. As a result, the traditional problems between departments started popping up again, processes seemed to slide downhill, and defects dramatically increased. Before long the company was in deep trouble and their employee population was so cynical about what had happened that when management asked for help, they basically thumbed their noses.

What this example shows us is that for any new message to be introduced to an organization, management needs to consider not just the front but the big back that it is likely to create. If you want your message to have a sustainable impact, it's important to consider what's missing before making promises, implementing change processes, and taking actions that may well backfire. This isn't to suggest that one should just shrink back from the challenge of creating a better tomorrow for one's organization or get stuck in endless planning and elaborate preparations. Rather it is to suggest, as mentioned earlier, that one of the most overlooked factors in getting a message through so that it's not only implemented but sustainable has to do with what we call a rigorous active inquiry. A well designed inquiry not only allows us to step back and see the big picture but to see what's missing and to take more powerful actions.

The rigorous inquiry that we are suggesting here has to do not only with getting a message through in the short to mid-term future, but also with creating the organization by design, so that strategy is consistent with it, structures are congruent, and systems aligned. This isn't something to be accomplished today, tomorrow, or next week, but in the next 4 to 6 months to year or more. Thinking things through and gathering the necessary insights, as an individual and as a team, is a creative process that takes due diligence. One suggestion we might make is to assign a team of managers who have strong opinions and aren't afraid to express them to look at your current strategies over a period of months and begin the process of designing the organization around them. This approach gives people the time to come into alignment intellectually about the

best way to implement these strategies, as well as to break through the barriers to expressing the emotional commitment. The inquiry, we must emphasize, must not be casual but rigorous, active, and targeted to a specific result. Keep in mind that there is a way of inquiring, of engaging in questions, that is actually empowering with respect to the question—not the power of understanding, but the power of transformation.■

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