



Are You the Disconnected "Suit" Tucked Away in Your Office? Why Your New Year's Resolution should be to Get Out in Front and Lead!

By Renate Rooney

Almost all organizations are going through some level of change. As we know, change is tough for businesses and individuals alike. Strong leaders are never needed more than during important transformations.

As a leader, you must obviously prepare yourself for the change. But, you quickly need to open that office door, interact with your staff, and assist them in preparing for the changes ahead. Grab on to that optimism and hold it high for your staff to see! Better yet, hand it off to them so they welcome the new changes with enthusiasm. And don't forget to lead through action, not just words. This doesn't mean you have to be the best functional expert in each business area, but instead, you need to demonstrate positive, productive behavior that staff can model.

Tips for Change Leaders in the New Year

1. **Help clarify the business model at hand**—Focus on what is important and set priorities. Simplify the work as much as possible, clearly defining the business model. Keep your eye on the horizon, not just the bottom line. Remember to be aware of opportunities and distractions—both surface frequently during change. Push the new business model forward while keeping an eye out for new avenues of growth as well as unforeseen challenges.
2. **Communicate, Communicate**—You won't always have all the answers, so in the absence of information, communicate honestly and directly with people. Reach them at a personal level by understanding their hopes, concerns, and frustrations. Continually create opportunities to mutually share information and experiences. By understanding what people are thinking and feeling, you can more easily help them to facilitate change.
3. **Be clear with expectations**—Clarify goals, allocate the resources, set dates for completion, and then allow your team autonomy to do the task at hand. But, be careful not to let change become an excuse for not meeting realistic deadlines.
4. **Build relationships at all levels in the organization**—Have a keen understanding of relationships within your organization, whether it is a large, complex organization or a smaller, less involved business. Seek out working relationships with all employee levels, from senior management to front-line staff.
5. **Be accessible and present. Listen.**—Make yourself available to your team and colleagues. Ask questions and listen carefully to the responses. Integrate staff ideas into the big picture. Is your staff not saying much? Sometimes silence can speak volumes and you need to be present to understand the possible implications. Try to always be conscious of how your presence and style affects others.
6. **Excite and motivate staff**—Change is much easier when people are excited about it. Again, be enthusiastic and infuse your staff with this excitement. Encourage people to use their creativity, strengths, and skills during the change.
7. **Try new things**—Tolerate risk and yes, even failure. Explore possibilities since some of the most far-out ideas often become the best ideas. Help people promote their new ideas, while fitting these ideas into the larger context of the business's strategic plan.
8. **Build a great team**—Strong teams are the foundation of strong companies. Develop your team by understanding them as individuals. Focus on their strengths, while patiently helping them overcome their weaknesses. The stronger your team, the better it will embrace change.



9. **Be curious. Challenge the status quo**—If you are prepared to accept the same old same old, that is exactly what you will get.
10. **Trust your instincts, be confident with your decisions**—Trust your gut and express your ideas willingly and confidently. Trumpet the good ideas of your team to other decision makers.
11. **Build your own support system**—Even leaders need help and support. Surround yourself with strong advisors and mentors—and listen to them. Change is challenging at all levels.
12. **Create a learning culture**—Learn with your team. Create an environment that allows people to continually learn and grow. A period of transition is the perfect opportunity to imbue a culture of learning.
13. **Have fun**—Create an atmosphere in which people enjoy working. The business at hand is serious, but take time to laugh. Happy people handle change more effectively. So as we enter 2011, set a few goals that will help you achieve your full potential as a leader. Consider them part of your New Year's resolutions...

As a leader, this year I can . . .

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