Influencing for Change in a Divided World

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Divisiveness in the external world is impacting organizational culture. When family members question sharing holidays because they don't want to hear each other's differing views, it is certain similar impacts are happening in the workplace. This creates a clarion call for leaders to proactively build an environment that supports connection over separation. We are discussing this vital topic in our webinar https://www.trainingindustry.com/webinars/influencing-for-change-in-a-divided-world.aspx.

The source of this sharp discord is often based in value differences and that is what makes many so intransigent. For example, if someone believes it's only right if people are treated X and someone else says no X – 3 is plenty for some people, emotional responses will be triggered. It's likely both perspectives can be well argued, but they are hard to hear for the person disagreeing. This can lead to cliques and factions just when you need people to spark creativity in one another because they can think differently. What can a leader do?

Leaders need to start with evaluating their workforce and organizational culture. However, before they can evaluate others, leaders must first be personally accountable. Ask yourself how attached you are to your point of view and your opinions – are you open to hearing very different perspectives? When a position is important to you, can you listen and have a coherent discussion with a colleague or staff person who disagrees? Or do you just walk away? Leaders are role models; people will follow your example. Is that a good thing?

Now discern how your workforce is doing by reaching out and actively listening. You might create a task force to lead the effort. Ask questions and take notes in order to respond.
   "How are you and your team mates getting along?"
   "Are you having full discussions or do you stop in order to avoid conflict?"
   "Are there people here you're avoiding that you used to work well with?"
   "On a scale of 1-10 where is our trust level riding these days?"

Give them a sense of how you see issues being discussed, and tell them how you feel. "I feel ___ because _____." Then actively listen and role model how to respond to one another. "It sounds like maybe you feel ___ because _____."

Talk about what you are learning while using all your smarts – IQ and EQ. if there's an elephant in the room, expose the discord in a manner that keeps the conversation safe for exploration. That means that above all else everyone is treated with respect. Leaders are responsible for insisting on a safe environment that maintains the value that while disagreements happen, there can also be very solid areas of agreement. You want your staff to be able to move on from the difficult conversation and continue their work together with a willingness to listen and share.

Once understanding is gained on workforce connectivity, leaders need to guide the desired change that can expand collaboration over separation. In doing so, success requires understanding the personalities of leaders and staff related to making changes. Data helps guide strategically targeted interventions. The Change Style Indicator® (CSI) identifies three styles of change. Through this assessment people find they are Conservers (prefer to accept the structure and make incremental change), Pragmatists (will explore the structure and support change that is functional), or Originators (comfortable with challenging the structure and preferring expansive change). These are big differences, and it is quite possible all preferences are represented in your workforce. To implement the change successfully people preferring each of the change approaches need to be brought on board. Without doubt, it's tempting to say "Just do it!" The problem is that quick dictate can't change internal states that are leading to the divisiveness. A defined viable path needs to be created. The foundation of change is strengthened with mutually agreed values, such as everyone deserves to be respected. Then use flexibility to gain buy-in and changed behavior from the whole staff through process that influence change and show how with emotional intelligence skills.

Throughout this process leaders are influencing people to change their behavior. No one can make someone else hold different values or communicate differently. What leaders can do is invite changes, demonstrate the inclusive language, hold staff accountable and use many other strategies to influence success. Once again, data helps. The Influence Style Indicator™ guides leaders and staff to understand the approaches they now use and to recognize how to expand their repertoire of influence strategies. Leaders charged with building rapport and engagement need to select influencing approaches that walk their talk. Two orientations are possible – advocating or uniting. Then having chosen the overall approach the specific styles a leader might employ are rationalizing, asserting, negotiating, inspiring and bridging. It is easy to argue that for a change such as building collaboration through improved communications and patience that inspiring and bridging are the best strategies. However, use caution in narrowing your style. Check out the preferences in the workforce. For example, sometimes assertiveness is required to set boundaries for what is acceptable.

Emotional intelligence skills contain the wherewithal to actually make the changes once leaders have selected their change and influence strategies. Making cultural shifts of this importance can well call on all 16 skills of the EQi. The most impactful are:

- Emotional self-awareness
- Empathy
- Impulse control
- Assertiveness
- Optimism – and Happiness

These are skills that can be learned, sharpened and tailored to specific circumstances. Many of our books and other articles show you how.

Demonstration of super respect, with reciprocity, makes the fundamental difference. This introduces new awareness and connectivity. Successful leaders will use their skills to understand the diversity of their workforce and how to approach change and influence their staff and co-workers. Then they will apply emotional intelligence skills to accomplish the desired behavioral change.