

## **Building Successful Teams in the Midst of Transition**

by: Thomas W. McKee

Some people seem to thrive on change. How do they do it? How do they manage change in a way that they not only survive, but also excel? They seem to make change work for them. Martin Luther King, Jr., Margaret Thatcher, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan and Mother Teresa — with resolute courage and determination — stood squarely in the center of change and controversy. These great leaders created their own opportunities to fight for what they believed in. This is the challenge and opportunity for you.

Each of these leaders were masters of change. One of the most significant essentials for success during transition is teambuilding. Leaders that can challenge, motivate, and empower their teams through change are successful. Most change disrupts teamwork. The leaders who can keep their work teams focused during changes will have organizations and businesses which thrive.

Health care and banking are two industries, among many others, which are experiencing dramatic change at this time. For the last five years I have had the opportunity to consult and train health care groups and banks during their times of transition.

American River Bank is a growing and profitable bank in Sacramento, California. Several years ago they were experiencing significant growth and purchased another bank. One of the changes that was impacting the bank was the integration of bank officers from two different banking systems. The question was raised, "How do you effectively merge two banking teams?"

President, Bill Young, effectively built a team that did not just survive change, but thrived. They choose the theme for the year, "Thrive in '95!" I spoke at breakfast meetings and held special training sessions on the importance and role of team players in the midst of transition. I remember the high energy during these sessions as work teams were synergized. The bank has continued to grow and has a positive reputation in the business community in Sacramento.

Capitol Periodontal Group is a growing periodontal practice of five doctors and about 35 employees. Dental specialists, such as periodontists, depend on general dentists as the gatekeepers for their continual referrals. When gatekeepers begin to recommend other specialists, business can eventually dry up. Several years ago, when one partner left the group, the general dentistry community wondered what was wrong. Why would one partner leave a thriving business to join another? The staff also struggled with this change since the one doctor brought in a great deal of business.

But Capital Periodontal Group focused on a strong strategic mission. They developed a strategic plan for the transition and kept focusing on sound periodontal health care and building a team of caring workers. I facilitated several workshops on team and patient communication. In the past few years, the group has added two more doctors and is recognized as a fun place to work because of its team spirit. At a recent workshop, each of the doctors sat and listened to small groups of employees evaluate each doctor's communication skills. I have worked with a lot of businesses in communication. However, this is the first time I ever saw partners who listened carefully to their staff evaluate their communication skills with patients. No wonder they are growing and the staff enjoy working together.

When taking a team through transitional times, we emphasize the following five essentials. Not only are each of these essential, but they are listed in the proper order. Each one builds on the preceding one. Get one out of place and you disrupt the team. The five essentials are the basic outline of our consulting, training and development.

## **Essential One: Knowledge**

Is your company a learning organization? A learning organization includes the following characteristics:

1. A belief that systems thinking is fundamental
2. A climate that encourages, rewards, and enhances individual and collective learning
3. A view that holds surprises, mistakes, and failures as learning opportunities
4. A desire for continuous improvement and renewal
5. Learning integrated with work

Do you have knowledge workers or skilled workers?

Successful businesses today focus on knowledge workers. Knowledge workers are entrepreneurial — visionary and creative. They look at their job as a business and serve other workers in the company as their customers. Knowledge is the foundation to vision

## **Essential Two: A Focused Vision**

The team must have a unified mission.

The team mission is not for the customers, it is for the staff

The team mission must be developed by the staff — for ownership

Without knowledge, the team mission is a false hope

## **Essential Three: Faith**

Doubt and skepticism will erode the team spirit

The dynamic team must have a strong faith and trust in the mission

Faith is no stronger than the truth of its assumptions

Therefore, faith must be built on the first two factors:

Faith without knowledge and vision is merely presumption

## **Essential Four: Initiative**

Peter Drucker says that "sooner or later all plans degenerate into work."

How do you motivate your staff to do their part? You don't. Motivation is an inside job: It is internal. Therefore, daily initiative comes from making sure each person is doing the part of the whole that they feel they can best contribute to the overall mission. Initiative without knowledge, vision and faith is misguided energy.

Without initiative, knowledge, vision and faith are just a dream.

## **Essential Five: Training and Development**

Jerry Rice of the 49'ers practices catching 100 balls a day with one hand. You would think that after playing professional football for over 10 years, he would know how to catch a football, right? But he gives himself to constant skill development. American Society of Training and Development found the following major competencies as models for human performance improvement:

Industry or corporation awareness

Leadership skills

Interpersonal—relationship skills  
Technological literacy  
Problem—solving skills  
Problem—definition skills  
Systems thinking and understanding  
Performance understanding  
Knowledge of interventions  
Business understanding  
Organization understanding  
Contracting skills  
Advocacy skills  
Coping skills  
Ability to see the big picture

Great teams are made up of knowledge workers, who have a focused vision, believe in their mission, and empower each other with their initiative and skill development.