5 Steps For Leading Through Adaptive Change

Leadership and management are two distinctly different but complimentary skill sets that all companies need. Leaders make sure the organization is doing the right things, while managers make sure they do those things right. Leadership is about coping with change while management is about coping with complex issues. Both are qualities that can be learned and both require constant focus on improvement. Especially when the organization is facing potential adaptive challenges.

As markets evolve and new technologies emerge, companies require leadership that can foresee the need to adapt and continually be auditing existing processes and organizational structures. Those companies that get this right continue to grow in value. Those that don't become stagnant and sometimes fail. It depends on the maturity of the leadership in the organization and their ability to bring team members at all levels together in efforts to evolve.

Here are five key steps for leading an organization that faces adaptive challenges.

Give direction. One of the most important responsibilities a leader has is providing direction for the team. This seems obvious but it's not as easy as it sounds. Sometimes leaders think they are providing clear direction for the team, but this can sometimes be more of an assumption than reality. I know because I've failed at this in the past. Communication and repetition is critical to ensure that all team members know the plan and what their specific roles are for contributing to mission success.

Provide protection. Organizational changes within a company can be scary for the team especially if they are unclear why the changes are being made. All good companies have to adapt as they grow. It's a great problem to have, but it is the responsibility of the leadership to help the team understand that the change is a positive necessity. Protecting the team from external threats and maintaining a confident attitude will help the team stay focused on their responsibilities instead of updating their resumes.

Clarify roles. Adaptive change requires auditing of existing systems, roles, and responsibilities. This process can often result in essentially rebuilding the entire company by redefining job descriptions, consolidation, elimination of overlap, and creating greater efficiencies. All of these activities will mean running a better more profitable business.

Manage conflict. Positive conflict is not only healthy, it's imperative. Passive aggressive behavior or simply avoiding conflict only results in toxicity and things not getting done. Address conflicts as they arrive. Challenge existing processes. And maintain order as the company evolves so the team knows that a little bit of chaos is sometimes inevitable.

Shape the norms. As a company experiences change, there will be many things that it should stop doing, and many things it should keep doing. Leaders need to ensure that certain norms are maintained in order to keep the company moving in the direction dictated by the overall vision. These norms can be anything from certain ways the company does business to culture protecting activities that support the value system.

Great leaders that guide a company through necessary changes don't do it all by themselves. They bring all team members together and leverage their talent pool in a collaborative manner. This creates buy-in at all levels which is critical. They identify stakeholders and place the responsibility on them for rolling out new processes. Change doesn't have to be stressful. Face it head on and keep the company moving forward.