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Volatility is the New Norm

In today's new normal business environment, volatility is the new norm. Change is required to remain competitive or to become competitive. If you manage change better than your competition, you'll have the opportunity to leapfrog the competition.

In the last several years, I've seen a multitude of examples of companies going through change - the implementation of a new enterprise-wide system, a company sale process, a company turnaround, double digit sales growth, business process change and improvement, etc. This trend is only increasing as Executives realize that change is not only a necessary evil but is also required to support continued and improved business results.

Based on my experience with multiple companies in multiple industries in managing change, I've uncovered a few secrets that apply to all of them in how to manage change while achieving positive results. Communication is the obvious path to success; however, the secret is in the communication process, material etc.

1. **Explain the whys.** This might sound obvious but it is often overlooked. Begin by communicating about the change - why is it required? What if we don't change? Why is it important to the company goals? Once people understand why, they can accept the change. I've found that the opposite of the common thinking of "people don't like change" to be true - so long as people understand the change and are communicated with proactively, they are typically fine with change - and many are even excited about it.
2. **Communicate the plan.** It doesn't matter if you have a detailed plan; just communicate the basics - what is happening, what are the likely next steps, how will the change affect them, etc. Don't worry about what you don't know. Just tell them what you know and what you are able to communicate at this time, and let them know that you will communicate as you know more - and do what you say you will do. If it is a sensitive subject matter such as a company sale, communicate what you are able to tell them and let them know that there are elements of the process that you cannot share but that as you are able to share additional information, you will. The critical part is that they know that you will communicate what you can when you can - this avoids the large issue that arises when people with missing information fill in the gaps with what they think (and it is almost always much worse than reality - and it definitely results in significant roadblocks to success).
3. **Listen.** Provide a vehicle for people to communicate their concerns, ideas etc. You don't have to have all the answers; just listen. Listening is an undervalued and underused skill - use it! You'll be surprised by the results - the key is to truly listen. Don't think about your next appointment or what you'll have for dinner. Focus your attention on listening.

I've heard feedback that these secrets sound "too simple". My response to that is "great" - I've found that it doesn't matter if it is simple or complex. The result is what matters, and these secrets "work". Why waste time with a complicated and hard to understand process if you can achieve the same results or better ones following a simple one?

Lisa's Tips: Customer Communications

Customer communication is always a good idea; however, leveraging customer communications during the new normal business environment is vital to success.

1. **Pick up the phone** - some of the largest successes I've seen result from simple yet critical conversations. It can be as simple as calling a customer to discuss current business and to stay in touch.
2. **Win-win** - remember to look for win-win opportunities in your conversations / meetings with your customers. Two heads are typically better than one - take advantage of already existing relationships to find win-win opportunities to increase business/ profitability.
3. **Watch trends** - although elaborate forecasting programs can result in increased business and/or improved efficiencies throughout the supply chain, watching and proactively managing to a simple trend line can many times be just as effective.
4. **Joint programs** - there are many opportunities to develop programs with your customers to share freight/ transportation costs, improve service to your joint end customers (if applicable), collaborate on packaging opportunities, improve efficiencies, tightly manage inventory, etc.
5. **Think about value** - instead of focusing on selling, think about how to provide value to your customers. How can you add value to your customer's business? Focus on providing value and you'll likely end up with win-win results.

Recommended Reading

"[*Million Dollar Referrals*](#)" by Alan Weiss – an excellent book on how to master the art and science of referrals. I can't think of a profession or career where this type of information wouldn't add value.

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