

Indicator: Communicate the message of change. (5138)

Evidence Review:

Research and experience indicate that successful turnaround leaders typically begin their change efforts by articulating a clear and compelling vision for the future of the organization. Turnaround principals should make their goals and expectations clear from the start of the year by creating a vivid picture of what success will look like and what it will mean long-term for children. In a school that has been failing for years, staff members may not remember or believe that student learning success is possible. The leader's vision includes committing to bold, specific learning goals for students—not merely promising that the school will “improve” or students will benefit from a new strategy or program.

As part of this vision, principals should clearly describe the specific steps staff members must take to achieve the new goals. Successful turnaround principals reform their schools in the interest of students, not adults, and many changes may involve behaviors that are difficult or unfamiliar to staff. Being very specific about required steps and the necessary actions to carry them out helps capable staff members make the change, and puts those who do not change on notice.

Turnaround principals should also make clear that the changes that will be required to carry out their vision are not optional. Staff members should know that they will not be permitted to “fly below the radar” to avoid making uncomfortable changes. Some staff members may be skeptical or take a few weeks to buy into the vision and may require encouragement and support during that time. Others will resist change consistently, or attempt to perpetuate the status quo while they wait out this wave of reforms. Turnaround principals can spur desirable departures among these staff members by remaining committed to their vision and the new behaviors expected of staff. Leaders may also candidly suggest that these staff members might be more comfortable—and perhaps more successful—in a different school environment.

Source: Kowal, J., Rosch, J. L., Ayscue Hassel, E., & Hassel, B. C. (2009). *Performance-based dismissals: Cross-sector lessons for school turnarounds*. Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation & Improvement.

Evidence Review:

In successful turnarounds, leaders use influence to win the support of both staff and external stakeholders for the changes the organization needs. Several leader actions fall under this influence category. The first is *communicating a positive vision for future results* (Almanzán, 2005; Beer & Nohria, 2000; Beer et al., 1990; Blankstein & Cocozzella, 2004; Charles A. Dana Center, 1999; Duke et al., 2005; Gadiesh et al., 2003; Galvin & Parsley, 2005; Garvin & Roberto, 2005; Hamel, 2000; Heimbouch, 2000; Hirschhorn, 2002; Hoffman, 1989; Joyce, 2004; Kim & Mauborgne, 2003; Kotter, 1995; Meliones, 2000; Mullen & Patrick, 2000; Olson, 1999; Parcels, 2000; Pascale et al., 1997; Paton & Mordaunt, 2004; Walshe et al., 2004; Waters et al., 2003; Werkema & Case, 2005; Wilms et al., 1994). Participants in persistently failing organizations have often come to believe that the low-performing status quo is inevitable; it becomes essential for the leader to put forward a positive vision of what might be.

A second critical leader action in this category is *helping staff personally see and feel the problems their “customers” face*. (Almanzán, 2005; Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990; Charles A. Dana Center, 1999; Doherty & Abernathy, 1998; Duke et al., 2005; Galvin & Parsley, 2005;

Garvin & Roberto, 2005; Heimbouch, 2000; Joyce, 2004; Kanter, 2003; Kim & Mauborgne, 2003; Kotter, 1995; Meliones, 2000; Mordaunt & Cornforth, 2004; Olson, 1999; Parcels, 2000; Paton & Mordaunt, 2004; Paul, 2005; Walshe et al., 2004; Werkema & Case, 2005; Wilms et al., 1994).

In New York City, Bill Bratton dealt with this problem by putting key managers in the transit police face to face with the daily problems that plagued the department, so that they could not deny the reality of failure. Transit officers were asked to ride the subways that their constituents feared. This encouraged employees to see the customers' perspective and become part of the solution rather than deflecting criticism they felt was directed at them (Kim & Mauborgne, 2003). A turnaround principal reported accomplishing this by challenging her teachers to look at their class lists before the school year started and identify the students they did not think they could teach how to read. The principal reported that she leveled this challenge to help the teachers see the effect they can have on students and communicate her expectations. At the same time, she committed to providing the teachers with the support they would need to succeed. Teachers reported that this simple question was extremely potent and stuck with them long after the faculty meeting (Almanzán, 2005).

Another key action is *getting key influencers to support change* (Almanzán, 2005; Appel, 2005; Boyne, 2004; Brenneman, 1998; Buchanan, 2003; Charles A. Dana Center, 1999; Duke et al., 2005; Galvin & Parsley, 2005; Garvin & Roberto, 2005; Hamel, 2000; Heimbouch, 2000; Hirschhorn, 2002; Kanter, 2003; Kim & Mauborgne, 2003; Kotter, 1995; Meliones, 2000; Mordaunt & Cornforth, 2004; Mullen & Patrick, 2000; Olson, 1999; Pascale et al., 1997; Paton & Mordaunt, 2004; Teerlink & Ozley, 2000; Walshe et al., 2004; Waters et al., 2003; Werkema & Case, 2005; Wilms et al., 1994). Research has shown that during the implementation phase of a turnaround, for example, successful organizations frequently develop turnaround campaigns to ensure that restructuring takes place in an environment that is receptive to change (Garvin & Roberto, 2005; Hirschhorn, 2002; Kim & Mauborgne, 2003; Kotter, 1995). Such a campaign is built on clear goals, employee input, and transparency in the change process, as Garvin and Roberto (2005) found in their analysis of the turnaround at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston. There, the turnaround leader engaged in significant work up front to persuade the current employees to support his plans for change, making them more likely to listen to bad news, question the status quo, and consider new ways of working in the organization. In his analysis of turning around institutions of higher education, Paul (2005) identified the importance of acknowledging the crisis as a critical aspect of convincing employees to change. A related action is *silencing change naysayers indirectly by showing speedy successes* (Almanzán, 2005; Charles A. Dana Center, 1999; Duke et al., 2005; Galvin & Parsley, 2005; Garvin & Roberto, 2005; Hamel, 2000; Kim & Mauborgne, 2003; Meliones, 2000; Pascale et al., 1997; Paton & Mordaunt, 2004; Walshe et al., 2004; Werkema & Case, 2005; Wilms et al., 1994). As discussed above, early, tangible wins are a hallmark of many successful turnarounds.

One of the reasons, it seems, is that early victories make it difficult for opponents of change to gain traction. Successful turnarounds are typically marked by *measuring and reporting data frequently and publicly* (Beer et al., 1990; Brenneman, 1998; Buchanan, 2003; Charles A. Dana Center, 1999; Duke et al., 2005; Fullan, 2005; Gadish, Pace, & Rogers, 2003; Galvin & Parsley, 2005; Gibson & Billings, 2003; Joyce, 2004; Kanter, 2003; Kim & Mauborgne, 2003; Meliones, 2000; Mullen & Patrick, 2000; Pascale et al., 1997; Paton & Mordaunt, 2004; Rhim, 2004, 2005b; Walshe et al., 2004; Werkema & Case, 2005; Wilms et al., 1994). In the Duke Hospital turnaround, for example, the organization introduced systems to share information across teams about the organization's "bottom line" financial performance. This sharing of information helped drive home the reality that while financial results were not the organization's central goal, the

organization could not fulfill its social purpose without managing its bottom line (i.e., “no margin; no mission,” Meliones, 2000). Multiple principals in successful school turnarounds identified sharing data on a regular basis as a key means to identify practices that were working well, and alternatively, those that were not working. Rather than regarding the sharing of data as a means to criticize or punish, teachers reportedly grew to depend upon open discussions about data as a key means to improve their practices (Charles A. Dana Center, 1999; Duke et al., 2005).

One specific tactic in this category is *gathering staff in frequent open-air meetings, requiring all involved in decision-making to disclose results and problem solve* (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Beer et al., 1990; Buchanan, 2003; Charles A. Dana Center, 1999; Doherty, & Abernathy, 1998; Duke et al., 2005; Galvin & Parsley, 2005; Joyce, 2004; Kanter, 2003; Kim & Mauborgne, 2003; Kotter, 1995; Meliones, 2000; Mullen & Patrick, 2000; Pascale et al., 1997; Walshe et al., 2004; Wilms et al., 1994). Bratton’s NYPD experience involved mandatory semi-weekly strategy meetings that included top department officials as well as the 76 precinct commanders, each of whom managed 200 to 400 officers. At each meeting, a selected officer went before a panel of senior staff to present data and face questions about the precinct’s performance. A sophisticated data system known as Compstat displayed maps and charts indicating patterns of crime and police response. Analysts credit this approach with transforming the culture of NYPD in positive ways (Kim & Mauborgne, 2003). At Baskin Elementary School in Texas, teachers and administrators credit regular public conversations about classroom practice and student achievement with changing organizational norms and practices. The teachers plan together and share ideas as well as resources. They also visit one another’s classrooms to ask questions and offer advice (Charles A. Dana Center, 1999).

Source: Public Impact for the Center on Innovation & Improvement. (2007). *School turnarounds: A review of the cross-sector evidence on dramatic organizational improvement*. Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation & Improvement.

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