



# **Lead Teams**

## **Handout 9**

### **Dealing Effectively With Employees During The Ending Phase**

- **Inform your Employees About What Happened and Why.** Employees can accept that which they seem to have been necessary for organisational survival, especially if it can be shown that management did all it could to avoid the negative consequences of change. But don't forget **the human touch**. As one observer noted, you will often be presiding at something more appropriately viewed as a funeral than a business school class.
- **Explain to them what the Organisation is doing to Help Those Affected by Change.** Do not count on the rumour mill to provide an accurate account! Knowing how those affected by change are being assisted will not only help employees with feelings of guilt for having survived a **disaster**, but also ease such worries as, **How will they treat me?**
- **Tell Key Contributors That They Are Important.** Your "stars" need to be told that they are seen as such before they panic and run to the competition. Additionally, everyone needs to hear why they are essential to the reorganized operation and that you will be counting on them.
- **Refrain from unfavourable Comments about Employees Who Were Transferred, Demoted or Who Have Left.** "Bad-mouth" these employees and you risk losing respect and trust. Explain the criteria in general, using such terms as longevity, function, contribution, etc., but make it clear that none of those leaving would have had to leave were it not necessary to reorganize or cut back on staffing levels.
- **Refrain from promises that there will Be No More Changes.** If the future is uncertain, it is better to be "up-front" and say so, while explaining what steps the organization is taking to avoid additional upheavals. If you give assurances that prove to be false in the near future, the resulting breakdown in trust will take years to recover from. Rather encourage employees to assist in a strategy to cope with changes constructively on all levels, so that future changes might have less negative impact on their well-being.
- **Allow for Venting of Natural, though Negative Feelings.** View this as a natural part of the grieving and healing process. As a leader or manager, be prepared for personal, verbal attacks. It may be a good idea to have an outside consultant or an expert from human resources meet with your group to facilitate the venting. Some experts recommend encouraging spontaneously created rituals among employees to symbolize the passing away of the old way of doing things.
- **Outline the New Vision for the Organization and for your Unit.** Make it clear where the organization is headed now, in terms of mission and goals and how your unit fits into that

overall picture. Introduce values, formerly held or newly adopted and what the organization aspires to represent? Clarify for top management's vision for the future.

- **Explain What Actions Are Planned to make the Organization and your Unit a Success.** Employees need assurance that the organisation itself will survive and upheavals tend to raise doubts that this is the first step toward closing the doors. Explain what other strategies and plans the organization can follow to fulfil its mission and to achieve future profitability, competitiveness and growth. Also ask for their inputs, but only if you plan to really use it.
- **Over communicate!** For employees in the endings stage of transition, assume that much of what you communicate to reassure and reorient them will be lost due to feelings of upset or downright scepticism. Repetition is the key! Deliver the message in person, write memos, e-mail, post announcements, etc. One company also distributed video-tapes. Another sent letters to employees' homes after a downsizing to ensure the message got through accurately to anxious family members. Consistency of message, together with continuous updates can be very reassuring to employees that the ship is not rudderless and that someone is at the wheel.
- **Speak to the Group and Meet One-on-One.** This goes hand-in-glove with the previous suggestion. Everyone needs to hear the same message as a team; followed by an individual message in which you affirm that person's value and hear his or her concerns and feelings.

Successfully helping employees cope with significant change, as you can tell by now, can be an immense challenge! You will need to draw upon all your leadership experience and skills, knowledge, gut feelings, stamina and common sense, not to mention the necessity of continually learning as you go along!