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Leading *Change* in Your Organization

How can food and nutrition leaders drive change and still keep employees motivated and productive? Skillful leadership of change is a crucial attribute for maintaining a competitive business advantage, and often for career survival.

This article summarizes the material developed and used in the *Nutrition Fellows Leadership Institute* with the National Center for Nutrition Leadership, a participative effort between DMA (Dietary Managers Association) and MOWAA (Meals on Wheels Association of America).

Factors Driving Change

Constant change in our industry requires an organization to adapt continually. As a program adjusts to a new environment, teams, leaders, managers, and individuals may be required to change. Changes that begin with individuals, groups, and programs can also flow into the business environment (and your department) and become a factor that causes a response in others.

Responding to Change

While there are many reasons why individuals and organizations change, the essential steps in change remain the same. First we become aware of a need for change because we sense either a problem or an opportunity that commands our attention (*Develop Awareness*). Sensing the need for change, we begin to search for solutions which address the need. Foodservice managers have many options. For example, we may ignore the need and hope it goes away. We might talk to others (perhaps at the Annual Meeting) who have managed similar challenges to see what insight we can gain. We may simply take action to see what happens (*Develop Solution*). Once we choose a response, we implement the strategy and continue working until we satisfy the need or accomplish our goal (*Develop Performance*).

Operational Excellence

These initiatives are designed to sharpen performance and results in the business environment. These internally fo-

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Elements of Successful Change:

- **Capability and Readiness:** To what degree will targets resist or support this change? What level of stress existed among targets before the change was initiated?
- **Organizational Fit:** To what degree will this change disrupt the organization? Is this change inconsistent with the existing culture?
- **Synergistic and Innovative Solutions:** Will key initiating sponsors demonstrate sufficient commitment to the change? Will essential sustaining sponsors throughout the organization demonstrate sufficient commitment to the change?
- **Planning and Implementation:** To what degree are the change agents sufficiently skilled for this effort? To what degree will past implementation barriers be a potential problem?

cused efforts may, for example, come in the form of menu offerings that improve quality, profitability, and responsiveness to shifts in our business.

Innovation

These initiatives are designed to create or capture new opportunities that emerge in the business environment. These focus on internal changes that produce totally new products and services. Food service produces services and products, whereas other departments in healthcare facilities produce mostly services; so we have a lot to think about. Also these changes may include dramatic improvements in strategic capability, performance, or potential. Adding new equipment, for example, can facilitate innovation by adding items previously unavailable to your customers.

The Five Essential Change Steps

Living through change as foodservice professionals makes us part of the process within our area, and we are left to wonder how this all fits with change in the larger organization around us. Placed on a continuum, change can be defined in a series of five steps:

- Awareness
- Enrollment
- Solutions
- Commitment
- Performance

Successful change requires teamwork and problem solving among groups and individuals. Enrollment of group and individual objectives and strategies, as well as commitment, mutual action, and support, are essential if real change is to occur.

With these considerations in mind, let's further describe the five essential change steps.

1. Awareness

In building awareness, effective change leaders develop an organization's readiness and capability for change by focusing the attention of others on the opportunities or dangers that make change necessary. For example, we may use biological research to show why foodborne illness must be addressed. By helping people recognize the need for change, they foster ideas and actions that move an organization toward a constructive response, an operational improvement, or a strategic innovation.

Successful change leaders often focus attention on these issues:

- Demonstrating the opportunities and dangers presented by change.
- Developing the readiness and capability of the organization to accomplish necessary changes.
- Clarifying the strategic and tactical priorities of the organization.
- Initiating and supporting efforts to produce desired change.

2. Enrollment

When people recognize the need for change, they react. People interpret change in many ways or perceive different opportunities and dangers. Organizations with many departments such as Nursing, Environmental Services, or even volunteers, will get many different views, often causing a response to change in conflicting ways. If people have low agreement, they may operate in ways that undermine trust, try to take the safe route, attempt to work independently, or act with guarded response. There may be good reason for these beliefs if people and departments are insensitive to one another's interests, methods, and constraints. Unfortunately, most significant change requires cooperation and coordination. If people cannot be persuaded to work together, the organization may lack focus. Essential energy may be diffused on several competing change solutions that satisfy narrow interests, but fail to garner the widespread support needed to improve the organization or produce real innovation.

Successful leaders enable others to respond to change in cooperative ways, develop change solutions matching operational needs and preferences, and implement coordinated change strategies. They accomplish this by focusing on these activities:

- Motivating the desire for mutual support.
- Creating coalitions to support the development and implementation of change solutions.
- Ensuring that change solutions and plans match the needs, culture, and patterns of organizational members.

3. Solutions

The creation and implementation of effective change solutions heavily depend on problem-solving abilities of individuals and teams within your program. The ability to promote teamwork and innovative problem solving is perhaps the most important skill change leaders must possess. Effective leaders focus on these tasks:

- Clarifying a common goal and emphasizing the need for interdependence in reaching the goal.
- Seeking and valuing the input of others.
- Contributing suggestions and influence for constructive outcomes.
- Managing the decision process to ensure change solutions are developed and implemented effectively.

To be successful, change leaders must demonstrate strong capabilities for interacting with others, appreciatively understand diverse viewpoints, creatively integrating ideas and implementing the resulting plans.

4. Commitment

People may agree your change solution and plan is a good idea, but still fail to demonstrate the commitment needed to make the change a reality. In fact, serious opposition to your efforts may not even surface until it appears you are intent on and capable of pressing for your desired change. Resistance can take many forms, from open defiance to simple inattention and foot-dragging behavior. Either way, successful change depends on your ability to identify and resolve these conflicts quickly and effectively. Effective leaders know how to cultivate and exercise the political support needed to implement changes and achieve intended results. They accomplish this by focusing on these tasks:

- Gaining active support of those who oppose or resist the change solution or plan.
- Obtaining the operational sponsorship needed to ensure that change solutions and plans are implemented properly.
- Sustaining support for change initiatives long enough to produce desired results.

5. Performance

In the final stage of change, desired gains may finally become a reality. To ensure that this happens, change leaders must plan effectively and be able to help those assimilating and implementing change to do so effectively. This final phase involves these essential steps:

- Managing the transition between the current and desired state.
- Developing the abilities and willingness individuals need to produce the desired change.

- Establishing the supports needed to sustain the change once it has been achieved.

As managers, we need a particular mindset for managing change: one that emphasizes process over specific content, recognizes organizational change as a learning process rather than a series of programs, and acknowledges the payoffs that result from persistence over time as opposed to quick fixes. This mindset may be difficult to maintain in an environment that presses for meeting period budgets or short-term company goals, but it may be the only approach that will bring about successful change and innovation. ■

An advertisement for the CDM, CFPP Credentialing Exam. It features a white plate with a green pixelated '08' in the center, a yellow pencil on the left, and a silver fork on the right. Below the plate, the text reads 'CDM, CFPP CREDENTIALING EXAM'. The entire advertisement is enclosed in a green border with dark blue bars at the top and bottom.

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