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Strategies & Solutions for Your Career Success

A Note From Dave

Here at ExecuNet, we regularly stress the importance of networking. Having a strong group of supporters is invaluable regardless of whether you're an at-work executive or one currently in transition.



So it didn't surprise me when I read an article in *The Wall Street Journal* recently that suggests a new and different networking approach to mentoring. In "A New Approach to Mentoring," Kathy E. Kram and Monica C. Higgins say that just one person — one mentor — can't possibly offer the advice individuals need to navigate today's complicated workplace. They suggest building a network of people who can help guide you and your career — a "personal board of directors," they say.

The authors offer these tips to building your mentoring network:

1. Know thyself. Knowing your goals, strengths and weaknesses can help you determine who can provide support.
2. Know your context. Know how you will achieve your goals and who can help you reach them.
3. Enlist developers. Identify individuals who can also learn from you.
4. Regularly re-assess. Adapt your network as your career goals evolve.
5. Develop others. Make mentoring a mutually beneficial experience.

I have another suggestion: don't ever stop building your network. It's one of the most valuable career development tools you can have.

Sincerely,

Dave

Dave Opton
ExecuNet Founder & CEO
www.execunet.com/davesblog

Preparing for Change

By Marji McClure

Today's business environment is uncertain, to say the least, with company shutdowns, mergers and acquisitions, and layoffs garnering the majority of headlines and attention. Inevitably, with such uncertainty comes change — implementing new processes, adjusting to new leadership or a new company. Regardless of the complexity of the change, chances are most executives are in the midst of change right now, or will be in the near future. Their ability to adapt — and even thrive in a changing work environment — can strongly impact their career and separate them from the pack as leaders who can handle perhaps some of the greatest challenges in business.

"We will all need to shift our expectations of leaders during this time," says Maureen Metcalf, president of Ohio-based management consulting firm Metcalf & Associates. "They will no longer be the people who have the answers based on past experience, but rather the people who are able to figure out the answers with our help to challenges never faced before. It is more than managing change. Leaders and their companies will have a strategic advantage when they can see change as a chance to create opportunities that we never imagined a few years ago."

Opportunities include both growth to a company's bottom line as well as growth to an individual executive's career. "Research shows that when a senior executive effectively manages the change programs within a corporation, the results can contribute as much as 19.5 percent in shareholder value," says Allan Steinmetz, CEO and founder of Inward Strategic Consulting, a Massachusetts-based management consulting firm.

Contributing to the Cause

To be considered a successful change agent, an executive must be able to manage change for himself, his team and his entire organization. "A critical competency for every leader is the ability to not just lead change within a company, but also be prepared to react and manage changes that affect them at an organizational and personal level," say business consultant Milo Sindell and Dr. Thuy Sindell, a leadership consultant and coach.

In addition to vision and analytical and communication skills, executives need to possess superior conflict resolution abilities, says Susan Arth, CEO of Sea of Change, a California-based consulting firm that provides services such as executive coaching and career counseling.

To prepare personally for a change, executives need to be able to anticipate that change to ensure they will be part of any new processes

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adopted by their organization. Be engaged in what is happening in your company — where it is going and where it needs to go, suggests JE Martin, senior compliance project manager for Fircosoft Inc. and a GE-certified change management trainer. “If there is an important change happening in the business (of course, you have to be smart enough, savvy enough and in touch enough to know about these), see how to get involved and take an ownership stake,” says Martin. “Be personally invested in the change.” One way in which to accomplish that is to first be able to see that change is on the way.

What should executives do if they perceive change is coming? The Sindells, authors and co-founders of San Francisco-based Hit the Ground Running, suggest they take these actions to help determine if they will, in fact, be part of that change:

- Identify how to be involved in the change process/implementation team.
- Define how their organization will be affected.
- Begin to create a plan to support their employees and reach out to other groups to see options and opportunities.
- Proactively communicate to company leaders about ideas you have.
- If you realize that your position is doomed, then begin to craft an exit plan.

Getting Your Team Engaged

Once you, as the leader, become personally invested in an organizational change and solidify your future within the company, the next step is to help your team become equally invested.

It is especially important that an executive know all of the main details of an upcoming change so they can be effectively communicated to the team. The Sindells suggest an information-gathering stage in which executives learn about the size, scope and ramifications related to a change. “It is critical that the leader gathers as much information as they can regarding the change because they will become a focal point for information from their team,”

they say. “If they don’t have information, they will lack credibility and influence.”

Arth says it’s important for an executive to understand his team and its concerns and be available to answer any questions. “[Executives] need to listen, respond to questions and concerns with candor and allow time to adapt to changes,” says Arth. “There is always a period of resistance, and some need longer to accept change. Executives can convert managers to become change agents by opening the lines of communication, listening to brainstorming ideas and utilizing the talent available before decisions are cast in stone.”

Martin says there has to be a whole communication plan around the change. “The champion should have the same message as the manager and the people working on the change team,” she says. “There should be a plan to address different channels with different groups at different times for different purposes. Do I want people to know about the change? Or are they actually going to have to do something — take action — on the change message? You cannot over-communicate, but you can muddy the message if everyone on the team (from champion to workers) isn’t singing the same song or variation of that song.”

Houston-based executive coach Cecelia Rose says it’s important to talk about the change and let employees vent, if they need to. Once they feel they have been heard, they can move forward with the change, she says. “The sooner this is done, the sooner the change can take place,” adds Rose. “This leads to meaningful conversations and innovation. This will help minimize stress, burnout, depression, frustration and resistance to change, conflicts and negative attitudes, allowing for a more productive, high performance and profitable change for the corporation.”

If you communicate well with your team members, chances are they will adapt well to the change. A lack of communication can have more damaging effects than any change ever could. “What I hear from my clients, and I have been working with clients in transition for almost 15 years, is that they were not

angry about the change itself, but how it happened,” says Rose. “Not feeling respected and being the last to hear, not being asked for their input or what they know from their vantage point and knew from being on the front lines.”

Even if you are an effective communicator, it’s not a guarantee that you will receive buy-in from all members of the team. But at least these communications will provide insight into which staff members will be able to adapt to upcoming changes, and which may need to be reassigned or exit the company.

Communicating the Change

Cliff Hakim, author and founder of Massachusetts-based Rethinking Work, a career consulting and strategy firm, says that he directs his clients toward values-driven leadership as they embark on organizational change.

Hakim says the Giving Voice to Values program at The Aspen Institute Business and Society Program also promotes these values-driven development methods, and it suggests using these questions as a catalyst for meaningful action:

- What if I were to act on my values?
- What would I do and say?
- To whom?
- How?
- In what sequence?

“I have used these questions effectively and they have worked to raise confidence and ability in managing personal uncertainty and organizational change,” says Hakim.

Regardless of what strategy you use to communicate change, it’s important to have an organized process in place to deal with it. Martin says that she feels that every company should have someone who understands change management and can teach managers about it, and work with teams as well. This would not be a full-time position; instead, it would be a part-time add-on role for the right individual, Martin stresses.

Rose suggests bringing in outside help that specializes in guiding people through change processes. “This will support the company in moving forward with the change more quickly and help

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with getting the employees' buy-in on the changes taking place in the company," Rose explains.

If Change Management isn't Your Strongest Skill

While it is the role of a good leader to help manage his team through change, sometimes that leader himself admittedly has difficulty managing change on his own — therefore, helping others navigate through change can be a nearly impossible task. Experts agree that it's helpful to conduct exercises that help make change a more natural process in leaders' lives.

Steinmetz suggests that executives force themselves to change their own behaviors. Driving a new route to work or wearing a watch on the other wrist are simple, yet effective, exercises in change. "Executives need to force themselves to do things differently and recognize how hard it is to change behavior in one's daily life, and have a greater appreciation of

Expert Resources:

- Susan Arth, Sea of Change (suearth@yahoo.com)
- Cliff Hakim, Rethinking Work (RethinkingWork.com)
- JE Martin, FircoSoft (FircoSoft.com)
- Maureen Metcalf, Metcalf & Associates (Metcalf-Associates.com)
- Cecilia Rose (Cecilia@ceciliarosecoach.com)
- Milo Sindell, Hit the Ground Running (HitTheGroundRunning.com)
- Dr. Thuy Sindell, Hit the Ground Running (HitTheGroundRunning.com)
- Allan Steinmetz, Inward Strategic Consulting (InwardConsulting.com)

what it would take to embrace change within a large corporate environment," Steinmetz says.

Steinmetz adds that an inability to change can have an adverse affect on an executive's career if it isn't addressed. "Corporations have made as much [progress] as they possibly can in technological advancements and investments to improve performance," he says. "At this stage of process redesign and performance improvement, it is all about motivating, inspiring and enrolling people to embrace change."

He notes that executives who have adapted to change and executed change

management programs in their organizations are recognized within their industries for their achievements. "The classic executives who we often hear about are Jack Welch during his time at GE, Louis Gerstner at IBM, Steve Jobs at Apple, and the list goes on," says Steinmetz.

"The most successful leaders of the future will be those who are able to successfully adapt themselves and their organizations to take advantage of the changes we are seeing and will continue to see in our world," says Metcalf. "Their organizations will prosper when others do not. They will develop reputations for their successes." ■

Learnings from Landings

Only You Can Move the Job Search Process Forward

Even if you have an impressive résumé and outstanding credentials, your phone isn't necessarily going to ring as quickly as you expect it to. While, as a job seeker, you're anxious for the process to move along at a rapid pace, getting cooperation from others (such as recruiters) to hasten the process doesn't always happen. ExecuNet member Jeff Davis understands this first-hand and feels it's important for fellow job hunters to remember. "Don't underestimate either: the time lag between posting an opportunity and the response from a recruiter, or the low percentage response, regardless of how 'stellar' your résumé is," cautions Davis, whose search ended with a new C-level position.

Davis also advises fellow job seekers to not relax their search even when things look promising. "Don't back off just because you have three or four opportunities that

are progressing nicely," he says. "Until you have a signed offer in hand, act like you've got nothing." Davis learned this and more during his own search.

"I had two opportunities that went very far, only to have an internal candidate emerge and prevail, even though the hiring manager admitted they were less qualified than I," says Davis. "I have learned to always inquire about the existence of internal candidates early on."

Davis adds that he learned a lot about the recruiting community and how it operates during his job search. He says that he was unaware that sometimes junior-level recruiters conduct initial research with a candidate, but this is a process that has to be followed. "Even if they have not researched your background or done their homework, you have to be polite and respectful to the junior-level research associate to get to the partners," says Davis.

He adds that referring names of qualified candidates to recruiters can make them more apt to help you.

To help himself, Davis says there were four main strategies that worked best for him during his quest:

- Building and nurturing a personal network and being active in local area networking groups.
- Posting aggressively early on in the process after joining several paid posting services.
- Personally networking with private equity groups and venture capital firms.
- Reaching out directly to top-shelf retained search firms.

He also notes the value in enlisting services such as ExecuNet. "Set a pretty wide net and post aggressively on opportunities to get your information out in the recruiter community," says Davis. ■