

## **Stumbling Across the Transformation Start Line by Brenda Lynn Petrillo**

Who is Brenda Petrillo? Not your average Jane. Brenda is a self-starter. She worked her way through the ranks of Corporate America by working her ass off to be the best in her field. Brenda is a powerhouse fueled with 25 years of leadership and project management experience across varying industries. She has a passion for solving complex problems and delivering results across a broad portfolio of technology areas. Brenda has demonstrated success in managing global teams and working experience in China and Singapore. To learn more, go to [www.BrendaPetrillo.com](http://www.BrendaPetrillo.com)

Communication is the common thread throughout organizations. It is the leading cause to success or failure. In my professional opinion, poor communication is seemingly one of the biggest pandemics in organizations that must be overcome. It starts with our leaders and then filtrates throughout the organization like a terminal cancer. If your organization is struggling to transform, here's why.

### **Who's steering this ship anyway?**

There are two root causes to an absence of clear direction, the failure to communicate and the failure to execute. Leaders rarely discuss or deliberate direction or strategy for the future. They often fail to communicate a coherent message about the strategy to all employees of the organization. There are many activities to execute and the organization's leaders lack the alignment needed to gain the traction necessary to help the organization transform, adapt, and shape the future—activities that would ensure the organization's long-term, sustained growth. In my opinion, there are too many functions and individuals lack an understanding of how they fit or why they matter. As a result, people become complacent, content to just show up, take care of today's business, and hope that someone is in the wheelhouse steering the ship.

### **Lacking squad unity? Maybe you should join a cheerleading squad.**

There's no room for silo'd thinking in cheerleading. Otherwise, you risk dropping someone on their head. Silo's are an enormous challenge across organizations. When you overlay silo's with varying personalities, diversity of backgrounds, self-proclaimed agendas, opinions, views, and experiences – this creates a unique set of potential issues and division across teams. When people come into alignment and support common objectives, a diverse team of leaders can produce amazing results, take on the demands of customers, and meet the threat of competitors. However, if leaders stay in their silos, protect their own "turf," fail to share information, refuse to collaborate on shared problems, or lack the ability to think with an entrepreneurial mindset, the organization will under-produce and inevitably, fall on their head.

### **You are as strong as your weakest link.**

Organizations have a lot of hardworking people who have good intentions. However, despite their experience in the industry, their technical talent, and the subject-matter expertise that many leaders bring to the table, creating a high-performing organization is still out of reach. Everyone including senior leaders have at least one (and in some cases, multiple) leadership weaknesses. Sometimes leaders are aware of their behavioral shortcomings and in other cases, they are blind to their leadership deficits. I have found that people inside the organization are often afraid to candidly say what they think and helping wildly successful leaders with their shortfalls can be tricky to navigate. In order to successfully transform the organization to remain a competitive advantage in the marketplace, a unique mix of skills, key competencies, and behaviors are paramount. It is important that leaders lean on and maximize their strengths and search relentlessly for ways to close their own performance gaps and improve their behavior. Without continuous self-improvement, an organization's capabilities will be severely limited. If leaders don't constantly raise their game, then they will suck all the energy and employee engagement out of an organization. Leaders need to be constantly aware of and working on their personal opportunities for improvement. If one person fails, the whole group fails.

### **"Breaker One-niner", back it down, there's an alligator in the road.**

Most truck drivers find themselves needing to talk to someone to pass the time. One thing is for certain, these truckers far and wide have their peer's backs by simply communicating obstacles over the transistor radio. Organizations should take a lesson or two. Clear, open and honest communication sounds so easy, yet poor

communication and feedback is seemingly one of the biggest pandemics in organizations that must be overcome. There are two extremes of people that either do everything in their power to avoid confronting others and holding them accountable, or they receive pleasure from any opportunity to berate people, belittle them, and crush their spirits. I have worked with countless leadership teams in which the number one communication problem was a lack of honest, constructive, and open dialogue about the team members' practices, styles, skills, or behaviors. I have found that without a culture of openness, feedback, and coaching, organizations will struggle to thrive. A lack of clear direction and leadership alignment that exists in organizations results in many teams muddling through, enduring the bullying, and trying to guess what others including their leader wants and needs from them. Retribution for speaking up is a real thing in organizations. As a result, people fear reprisal or retaliation if they open up, but the reality is that leaders can't execute on their strategies, lower costs, or effectively launch new processes or services when people fail to communicate with constructive candor, so this is an issue that must be overcome. I will say it again, this is an issue that must be overcome.

### **Got leadership ROI?**

Building a solid high-performing organization takes hard work and a strong awareness of the culture and environment that exists. Most executives are very busy people with a lot of different things pulling them in several directions requiring their attention. Market conditions can change fast in a swift, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world – demanding huge portions of a leader's time. Unfortunately, while they're busy focusing on their many necessary operational distractions, many managers take their eye off the teamwork ball. This means that communication suffers, and leaders get preoccupied and fail to recognize people, celebrate progress, build the talent pipeline, or invest time reviewing processes, practices, and better ways of working across functions. As a result, people then become disengaged, feel marginalized, and lose focus and commitment. Leaders have a direct link to the key result areas of the business, which can either negatively, or positively impact leadership ROI. Yet, I am still floored by the simple fact that leaders fail to realize that without people there would not be processes, or technology, yet they are invariably the most overlooked and under-appreciated.

### **A quick technique in problem-solving resulted in the following key requirements and suggestions:**

- Take your employee engagement results seriously. Hold your leaders accountable and stop allowing your leaders to explain away all the inconsequential reasons why their employee results are so low.
- Bring in an organizational psychologist to focus on assessing individual, group, and organizational dynamics and identify solutions to problems that improve the well-being and performance of the organization and its employees.
- Develop an emotional intelligence (EQ) program to improve organizational effectiveness and relationships across the leadership team. EQ is a critical skill for leaders and managers. How do you know if your leaders and managers lack EQ? They tend to act out in stressful situations because they are not able to manage their own emotions. They may be prone to behaviors such as yelling, blaming, and being passive aggressive and all of the things I mention.
- Eliminate the referral program for directors and above. Why? The law of attraction states that "like attracts like." This means that people with a low frequency (low EQ, for example) attract the same type of person. We all know how leadership loves to bring people along with them. I get not all leaders are bad apples. However, if you eliminate this program at the leadership level, you are less likely to penetrate the organization with the same unwanted behavior.
- Stop arbitrarily promoting your technical staff (i.e., engineers, architects, developers, etc.) into leadership roles unless they meet a set of criteria (i.e., MBA, completion of an executive leadership development program, experience managing people for 12 – 18 months as a middle manager) that aligns with the organization's core values. Our technicians are great at what they do, but they do not necessarily make the best Directors or VPs. They are tactical and operational, not strategic. If you want an organization of leaders, look to your middle managers. Why? Most of them are servant leaders and if you ask their employees, they will follow them to the ends of the earth. Unfortunately, in a lot of cases, middle-managers are passed over because they don't fit "the mold" within the low frequency leaders running the show.

- Find your servant people leaders (i.e., middle managers) in the organization and promote them. They are the fuel that keeps your organization running at full steam and ensures that your leadership's strategic vision becomes an operational reality. Your middle managers are motivators, coordinators, productivity drivers, innovators, and decision-makers. They are strategic, tactical, and operational. Middle-managers are your future leaders and executives.
- Sounds harsh ... but cut out the cancer from your organization. There are people within the organization that will change, can change, and want to change. They are others that will not. You know who they are and if you don't, they are easy to spot. Unless they are removed from the organization ... see the Urban definition of insanity.
- For problems outside of communication, bring in an external consultant that specializes in critical thinking problem-solving, and driving action plans to completion to help IT Professionals and Business Teams to diagnose, fix, and maintain IT & Business issues effectively and improve their bottom line results.

Thank you,

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