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Change

From the Editor

Marie Curie, a Polish-French physicist and chemist who is the only laureate to ever receive a Nobel prize in two different sciences, made this observation, “I never see what has been done; I only see what remains to be done.”

I guess you’d expect a high achiever to make that kind of remark. This is a person who wants to get on with learning what’s next and to discover something new. Behind every door is another door. It may have been that Marie could consolidate as she went. Most of us non-Nobelers, however, need to take time here and there to assess the distance travelled and to itemize what has been learned. Doing so can lift the spirits and encourage us to continue on. Marie’s caution might be not to rest on your laurels and not to stop learning.

At LIVE Consultants Inc., we help organizations chart the distance they have come while, at the same time, focusing them on what still remains to be learned.

Marilyn Baetz, editor

About the Author and the Article

Nobody likes when a job is only half done. When somebody gives us work that is only half done, we are either confused or downright frustrated. “How could they not have seen that there was still more to do?” we mutter.

For sure, we’d never want to give someone else a half-done job. Others might see us as a shirker: a label that suggests laziness and half-hearted effort. Yet when it comes to change, that’s what we do. The half of the job that gets done is the design half; the half that doesn’t get done is creating an environment where the change will be accepted.

In this article, Stephen Baetz not only describes the importance of creating an environment where change will be accepted but he also defines several initiatives that leaders can take to do just that.

Stephen is a principal of LIVE Consultants Inc., the organization that sponsors this publication.



Stephen Baetz

Creating the Conditions

I know exactly where I was. On the 401 at Mississauga Road. Stopped. Nothing unusual about that. I considered how long I'd be there and whether I should find an alternative route. Nothing unusual about that either. "Just volume of traffic," the voice from the radio offered. Always thus. What was unusual was the guest on the morning show: Bill Buxton. His corporate title is Principal Researcher for Microsoft, which doesn't tell at all what he does or what he's about. There have been other attempts to do that: Designer for the World Narrow Web (off the wall), Professor (more conventional), Writer (who isn't), Musician (Hmmm), and Human-Computer Interface Guru (Really). He had just received a Doctor of Design honoris causa from the Ontario College of Art and Design and the host was about to get him to talk about what the recognition by OCAD meant. Bill jumped in with a string of seemingly random observations: the arts have been stripped out of the school system and so it is little wonder that innovation had just received a failing grade on the recent Conference Board of Canada's scorecard ... the connection between exposure to the arts and creativity is clear ... many of Canada's Nobel Prize Winners were also accomplished in the arts ... play is undervalued ... governments are taking too narrow a view if they only fund university research projects that have immediate relevance ... primary research can never be justified at the front end ... a longer view is needed ... innovation happens when people are allowed to explore unencumbered by the requirement to make something creative happen right now ... applications for the unexpected discoveries that come from play will show themselves at a later time.

I was moving now. But slowly.

Buxton? Did he say Bill Buxton? I listened as the interview ended and he was being thanked. Yes, he did. Now I remembered. This is the guy who, a number of years ago, had a speech he took on the road called *What If Leopold Didn't Have a Piano?* Leopold as in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's father. He speculated about whether Mozart would have

been the musical genius that he was if his father wouldn't have had a piano. The short answer is that a piano is not enough to make a genius. Other elements are required: a concert hall, other musicians, and patrons who are willing to accept the talent. By the time you finish listening to the talk the point is clear: innovation requires (and this is his phrase) "a cultural ecology." Resources are necessary but not sufficient; skills are necessary but not sufficient; encouragement is necessary but not sufficient; technical disciplines are necessary but not sufficient ... and so on. Many factors have to come together to help make Leopold's son a genius

Insight offered and understood.

Here's the part that draws me in. He made the pitch that innovators owned the responsibility for making the culture ready for the new ideas, new inventions. It isn't good enough to say you created something; you also have to create the conditions that allow others to accept that innovation.

I was moving again with no indication of what had caused the backup. As usual.

That interview on that day got me thinking about a series of recent dialogues I had had with some of my clients. All were embarking on major changes. One was re-creating how work got done; another was looking for a more meaningful way to engage customers; and yet another was reworking how they were going to re-engage the hearts and minds of employees. Although the change arenas were different, they had lots in common — all had dedicated many of the brightest and best in the organization to work on the initiative, all had committed significant resources, all had passion that this was the right thing to be doing. And all were worried that the change they were creating would not be accepted. And yet they were doing nothing (okay the fairer description is little) to create the conditions that would allow others to accept the changes. Sure the involvement of a few in the development of the new approaches is a bit of a start. The hope was that their enthusiasm would be infectious and the critical mass would catch the fever. Honestly, I think that's wishful

thinking. When I ask about why more effort isn't being invested in creating the conditions for acceptance, the answer I get is some combination of "we don't know what it's going to look like when we're finally done and if it changes people will become disillusioned" and "they may not like it and we can't afford to get them distracted."

My observation is that to delay creating the conditions for acceptance will only lengthen the amount of time it takes to have the change make any real difference to the business and that is always a bigger cost than managing the noise and anxiety that comes when people hear what the possibilities may be.

So what are some reasonable initiatives that leaders can take to create the conditions for acceptance? I offer these as a way to prime the pump.

Declare that learning is a survival skill.

At every appropriate opportunity, leaders should be making the connection that learning is the process of reading, assimilating, and accommodating. As the world changes, we have to figure out how to change with it and how we can contribute to helping it change again. That's true for the survival of individuals; it is also true for organizations.

The risk of clinging on to the way we've always done it when the world is changing is a high-risk strategy. Leaders own the responsibility of managing risks and must declare with remarkable clarity that to survive the organization must learn to read the environment, assimilate new ideas, and find ways to accommodate.

Articulate how the marketplace is changing.

Most people will make changes if there are good reasons to do so. Change for the sake of change or change for the sake of building change-making muscle is seen as frivolous. If, as I've just noted in the previous suggestion, reading is a required sub-skill of learning, tell everybody what you have read in the environment: what is changing in the

marketplace, in the competitive landscape, with employees, customers, or suppliers, with technology, and with legislation or regulators. And then go the next step: spell out the implications of those changes for your organization and everyone in it. The content of the dialogues that are held follow a straightforward pattern: Because of these changes in our environment, the implication for us is ... Then talk about the range of options that are under consideration and what the urgency is to make the change.

Avoid the temptation to only communicate when you have something concrete to tell people. In any change, that usually happens only weeks before you are ready to implement and then it is far too late. The implication is that you have to communicate often and let people know what you have thought about and discarded, tried and failed at. Employees want to know that what you have come up with has been thought through and you're not just trying to ram something through hoping it will work.

Run strategic experiments.

Find places where the new ideas can be tested before you do a master roll out. Share the results of the test with everyone candidly: this worked but this didn't. This type of transparency demonstrates that you are willing to do what you are asking everyone else to do: learn and share.

Talk about failures.

If people and organizations only have successes it is a sure sign that the bar hasn't been set high enough. Tell anybody who will listen that failure is and always has been a central part of learning. We learn from mistakes. Continue by noting that being content with failure or not learning from one is not acceptable.

So talk about what hasn't worked, what was learned, and how you're making the change even better. In other words, communicate that you're not going to quit, you're going to learn what to do to succeed.

Winning at the Game

Simply put strategic planning is figuring out what game you're in and how to win at the game. It allows you and your organization to

- ✔ identify what business you are in,
- ✔ determine what your organization wants to become,
- ✔ specify the moral benchmarks by which everyone in the organization will judge their behaviour, and
- ✔ decide how your vision of success will be achieved.

Those are the elements of a strategic plan. The actual development process for a strategic plan is one that companies often overlook, make too complex, or approach without any degree of practicality.

For that reason, we offer a strategic planning process that asks teams to come to consensus on the answers to several fundamental questions. One of the end results is, of course, a strategic plan ... but more important, that strategic plan

- ✔ provides an analysis of your internal and external environment,
- ✔ compels you and other employees to think strategically about the opportunities, challenges, and problems the organization faces,
- ✔ is straightforward and practical and, therefore, more easily understood and implemented, and
- ✔ makes it easy for members of the organization to contribute to a successful future.

Strategic planning doesn't have to be mysterious and strategic plans don't have to be confusing and obscure.

They help shape the organization's day-to-day operations. They guide every action and decision. They offer a compelling vision of where the organization wants to find success.

For more information about our services, contact us at (519) 664-2213.