Applying the Tipping Point for Real Change

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It is a common scene. Eight professional association department heads sit in the 3rd floor conference room with the executive director. They have done lots of hard work -- needs analysis, interviews, and discussions with vendors. After months of research, they finally have a clear handle on the problem and they see the solution. They are excited. Over the next four months, they envisage every employee understanding and embracing the new organizational change initiative.

Rolling out the change begins with a big kickoff, replete with logo coffee mugs and mass emails. Every staff member is sent to the same generic training course on the change. But employees, who are already overwhelmed with their current responsibilities, are underwhelmed with this new initiative. They may nod in agreement, but they quietly wish it would go away.

Fast forward four months. Nearly everyone in the association, from executive director to housekeeper, is left with that "flavor of the month" feeling. Coffee mugs and binders from the training are all that is left of yet another needed, well analyzed, and technically appropriate change.

According to research on change, 50-85% of change initiatives fail. They fail because it is too easy to ignore the effect that a change has on people and that people can exert on a change. Organizations can only change when people in them change. A change initiative can only succeed when people understand its value and thus think differently about their work. So what can a management team do to motivate their people to embrace a needed organizational change? How can a change initiative move from the heads of leadership into the heads, hearts, and hands of employees?

The Tipping Point Workshop is an innovative program that helps leaders discover how to progress from boardroom dreams to employee accomplishments. It leverages lessons learned from public health, systems thinking, and organizational theory to understand the factors that can make commitment to change contagious. It takes into account the interactions between attitudes that employees can have toward a change and seven levers of change or actions that leaders can take to foster a positive employee attitude toward an initiative.

The workshop uses a computer simulation to make the experience real and help leaders focus their dialogue around change. Working in teams, leaders create strategies and experiment with them on the computer simulation. Through teamwork and experimentation, leaders gain an appreciation of the interactions and intricacies of implementing change. They come away with practical, applicable, actionable knowledge.

Pat Natale, P.E.,CAE, F.ASCE, is the Executive Director, Chief Staff Officer, and Board Secretary of the American Society of Civil Engineers, a national organization of 60,000 members representing licensed engineers from all technical disciplines. He and his staff used the Tipping Point Workshop to help them frame a strategy to

drive new educational programs and evaluations.

In Pat's words, "*The Tipping Point Workshop really helped us look at change. We actually applied the concepts to a huge project -- changing the educational process for civil engineering. We particularly made sure we had the right infrastructure to get the job done, and instead of marginalizing resisters we learned a lot from them to make course corrections and sculpt the right message. Using what they learned [at the workshop], the team working on this change came up with very effective strategies. This is a model that our people are making real for critical changes to the organization. It was a good learning experience, but the dialogue at the end, what it means to us in the workplace, was the most exciting part. It was time very well spent.*"

Leadership is about doing, not just about talking. The Tipping Point Workshop provides a venue for leaders to experiment with actions that they can take to lead change in a risk-free environment. Through this experience they learn about actions that can unleash the creative power of the employees involved in a change initiative.

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Andrea Shapiro, Ph.D., of Strategy Perspective (www.4-perspective.com) developed the Tipping Point model and workshop.