

Relationships First, Then Systems

To any leader who is taking over a new organization, I would say that it's paramount that you do not try to change the world in one night.

When I took over this organization in 1994, it was ranked 88th of 90. Within three years, we were ranked No.1, in both 1997 and 1998. My two partners and I now lead one of the largest financial firms in the company, with more than 350 financial advisors.

Previously, I was working in Boston when I got promoted to the west coast of Florida. It was very broken when I got there. The experienced associates had detached themselves from the branch, finding no value in being affiliated. There were just a handful of newer associates and two inexperienced sales managers—about 30 people in all. What I did in the first six months was to have one-on-one meetings with every financial advisor and manager. I needed to know what was going well, what their current needs were, and how I might be able to add value to help them build their practice to new and higher levels.

About six months in, I began to get buy-in from those who had detached themselves. By learning about them and their goals, dreams, and motivations, it became evident that I cared enough about them to make them want to care about the organization. They viewed me as more of a strategic coach than a boss they reported to.

That took time. I wasn't able to change things immediately. Finally, I got the organization to come together as a team, to want to grow and prosper, and tripled the sales force.

I was given that advice by a manager who promoted me. He said, " I have one piece of advice to give you: don't try to change the world overnight." He knows that I, by nature, am a pretty impatient person and very proactive. But I had worked with him for five years, and he was very successful in the business. He was very passionate about that one thing. So I did take his advice, and it paid off. It was one thing he had learned in all the different organizations he had been in. I've given the same advice to other managers who have been transferred or promoted.

A simple example of allowing enough time is that, when I got to that office, I was very tempted to immediately throw out the entire training program and start from scratch. If I had done that, I probably would have implemented something that I perceived they needed but that may not have been a fit for the group. Eventually, I did change the training program for new associates. I also implemented a once-a-month study group for the experienced associates. I would have speakers come in, but it was a study-group atmosphere versus a training class.

I think that it is extremely important to be able to have transferable sales systems that have proven successful. But in delivering those systems, your success in building harmonious relationships first will determine the success or failure of those systems.

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