RingCentral

The role of leadership
in the return to work

RingCentral

Foreword

"By now, we've exhausted every cliché in the book. Life has changed, work has changed, and things simply aren't going back to the way they were. Adapting to these changes isn't easy, and there are plenty of challenges to face. That also means it's a chance to do things differently, to do things better.

It's a time for our leaders to demonstrate true leadership. As employees, we expect our leaders to recognise the latent value in the workforce, identify and invest in opportunities, and set the examples that create a workplace culture.

We have an opportunity to improve the way we work, for the benefit of employees, customers and, ultimately, businesses themselves. It's up to leaders to identify what that opportunity looks like in their own organisations and be prepared to lead their people into a better world of work."

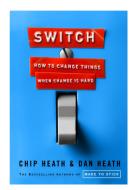Steve Rafferty, UK Country Leader, RingCentral

The need for strong change management

The disruption that has faced businesses today is unparalleled in our lifetime and is causing many organisations to have to change on the fly. As one of my executive colleagues recently said to me, "We feel like we're making things up as we go." This feeling, shared by many in corporate leadership positions, is why it's essential that each leader exhibits strong change management within their businesses.

Change management is not a new concept among business leaders by any means. Over the last 50 years, much has been written about how to manage change, the key building blocks for change management, and how to implement a change management programme. What makes this point in time so vastly different is the collective impact that has been felt by virtually every business across the globe.

As most of the world slowly begins the process of adapting to the new normal of work—*insert video conferences, working from home, and the potential elimination of offices as we once knew it here*—there are a few things leaders can do to manage these changes and ensure their teams' productivity and well-being continues to flourish.

Look for the bright spots

Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard

One may wonder, and rightly so, if there are any bright spots that have occurred over the last nine months since offices closed and the majority were forced to find a way to work from home. Rest assured that in most circumstances there are always bright spots that can be found.

This term "bright spots" is not uniquely mine. It's taken from Chip and Dan Heath, authors of *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard*. The concept is to identify those things or those people that are performing well and look to springboard off of those as a positive step forward.

For instance, you may have an employee who has excelled at the change, has developed a new approach to work, and improved their productivity and overall performance. In that case, that is a bright spot and one that should be evangelised throughout the organisation and let others learn and apply the change principles to their own selves or to their teams.

Oftentimes the role of leadership in change is not having all of the ideas in and of themselves but identifying the good things that are happening and making them known.

Be understanding

One late Friday afternoon, during my tenure with one of the software companies I used to work for, my phone rang. It was my new boss, who I had yet to meet in person. Despite this interpersonal deficit, he began to tell me in the strictest of terms all of the changes that were coming to our department. As he ended the conversation he told me, "So you can either get on the change train or stay at the station. I expect your answer first thing on Monday morning."

Never mind that the words "change train" had just left his mouth, I was still processing all of the changes that had been described and how many of them were impacting me and my ability to advance my career within the organisation. His sheer lack of understanding and any kind of empathy was astounding.

It was this call that was the catalyst for me leaving the organisation within a few weeks, and it highlights the importance of understanding when implementing change. Change can often be hard and leave people (who are at the heart of any business) feeling uncertain. Giving room

for these emotions and time for employees to process, ask questions, and give input so they can adapt more readily is vital to leading change and making it last.

Lead by example

I have often heard great leaders say, "I have never asked my team to do anything I was not willing to do myself." This is true of many, but the question that always pops into my head is, "But did you?"

It's one thing to say you're willing to do this or that as a leader, but do you actually lead change by example? Does your behaviour as a leader demonstrate the change you are looking to drive within your organisation?

If the answer is no, then your approach to change management and the outcomes will most likely fall flat. The strongest leaders often lead by example, and this is true when implementing and managing change.

In order for businesses to thrive in this period of time, they need strong leadership at every level. To expect that leadership is only within the executive suite is misguided. Every manager can and should lead, and by applying these principles, your teams and business will be better for it.

How leaders contribute to building a "responsive" business

Early on in my career, I worked as a manager in a firm of a call centre that among other things managed inbound calls for our clients. One of the biggest metrics that our clients were interested in was "speed to answer." For so many of them, it was vital that our representatives answered the calls after no more than two-dials (this was long before the advent of the automated phone trees of today), and responsiveness was paramount.

The value of businesses being responsive cannot be understated. This is especially true for the digital age in which we live where most consumers have been conditioned to receiving a response in seconds.

Responsiveness and customer experience go hand in hand, but what companies need to remember is that your responsiveness is only as valuable as your usefulness. What good is it to get a rapid response when the information or assistance that is supplied is not useful? The best it will do is only create frustration with your customer.

Business responsiveness, however, is not something that just happens, even with the best technology (side note, technology is not a strategy as it only enables it). In order for businesses to be responsive, leadership is perhaps the key factor. Here are three things leaders can do in order to ensure they have a responsive business.

Build a customer-first culture

A number of years ago I was involved with a meeting with one of my clients and the head of their customer support organisation. The goal of the meeting was to review a number of customer accounts and see if we could define some common support themes that were consistent and therefore be able to proactively address them.

What began as a constructive exercise quickly turned into a session where each customer was systematically disparaged and excuses made as to why my client was not responsive. After about 30 minutes of this unhealthy banter among my client's stakeholders, I chimed in by saying, "It seems to me you do not like your customers and have no interest in responding to their input, so why are we here?"

Needless to say, they did not stay a client much longer as we had a fundamental difference in philosophy, which never makes for a great client/vendor marriage.

One trait that all responsive businesses have in common is that they value their customer relationships. This must translate to every employee in the company so they can understand their role in delivering for their customers. This is not a one and done exercise, but a continuous process, and must start with leadership building this into every fabric of the culture.

Invest in training

It is not enough to simply tell an employee what their role in business responsiveness is; you must equip them to do their job and do it well. Organisations that want to excel in responsiveness and therefore improve their customer experience cannot afford to withhold training dollars.

If you are on the fence about making this investment, consider this statement from the *Harvard Business Review*: "In our research and consulting on customer journeys, we've found that organizations able to skillfully manage the entire experience reap enormous rewards: enhanced customer satisfaction, reduced churn,

increased revenue, and greater employee satisfaction. They also discover more-effective ways to collaborate across functions and levels, a process that delivers gains throughout the company."

Simply put, investing in the training for your employees will lead to good things for your customers and the growth of your business.

Empower your employees

"I'll have to check with my manager." When these words are spoken to a customer, the meaning behind them is, "I can't help you."

The world's most admired brands understand the value and impact in empowering their people to be responsive. They are able to do this because of their investment in training.

When I think about companies that have excelled in this area, I think of Zappos. Zappos is known worldwide for its above-expectation customer service, even down to its responsive web design.

Founder Tony Hsieh was obsessed with customer service and responsiveness. An article on Sharpen recounts two different occasions when Zappos employees both spent almost 11 hours on the phone with customers. This is unheard of, and when asked about this marathon support call, Hsieh responded by saying, "In many other call center environments, an employee's job performance depends on how quickly they can get the customer off the phone. At Zappos, we encourage employees to stay on the phone for as long as the customer wants, even if it's over 10 hours long. We know it sounds crazy, but as long as the customer is happy, then we are happy, too."

Building a responsive business is not something that will happen overnight, but in order for it to happen, leaders must set the pace and ensure that all employees understand their role and that the most important thing they can do is obsess about their customers.

Keeping a workforce virtually engaged and productive

Employee productivity and engagement has long been on the minds of corporate leaders as they seek to get the very best from their employees. Long before employees were sent to their at-home workspaces and conducting meetings over RingCentral, organisations focused on employee engagement as a way to increase employee productivity.

While these programmes do indeed pay dividends (research shows that engaged employees are 21% more productive than those that are not engaged) companies still have a long way to go. A study conducted by VoucherCloud in the UK found that the average UK worker is only productive for two hours and 53 minutes per day in a typical eight-hour workday. A myriad of other activities conducted during the workday was the culprit for the lack of productivity; including checking social media, reading news sites, and engaging with colleagues.

If this lack of productivity was evident before home offices were the new normal, imagine the challenges that present themselves to companies and employees in today's environment. This is where leadership needs to play a pivotal role—ensuring they are keeping their workforce virtually engaged and productive. Here are a few suggestions on how that can be done.

Practice emotional intelligence

It is an understatement to say that the last number of months have added stress to virtually every professional environment. I have spoken to many colleagues and professionals who feel the strain of being removed from their team, having to manage a home office (if they have an office), kids, and a new routine during the workday. As a result, they are finding themselves with an increased level of stress and emotion that can impact engagement and productivity.

One of the best things leaders can do to help their teams is to recognise these emotions, give space for employees to be open about their stress levels, and, if needed, invest in counsellors that can connect with their teams to help them process these emotions.

As I have written before, business is about people, and now more than ever, leaders need to take good care of their teams.

Be present

A friend of mine was recently telling me that since going virtual they have seen more of their leadership. Their leadership team has made a point of using video to communicate, holding town halls with the staff to answer questions and give assurances. In a word, they have been present.

My father has been known to say, "In the absence of communication, the imagination runs wild." This is never more true than today, so it is imperative that leaders be present, be ready to listen, and lead by example. Doing so will increase your employee engagement and productivity.

Help them set boundaries

Numerous studies have shown that over the last nine months of going virtual, the average workday has increased by two to three hours per day. I have not seen any study that says productivity and engagement have improved as a result.

In fact, a recent study has shown that teams are more productive when they have clear work-life boundaries. The idea of boundaries is something that I have spoken about quite often, and it is something that leaders should promote among their employees.

As human beings, we are not able to work continuously with no downtime. We are not wired to be always on, working well past "business hours," and at the same time able to be productive. Science has proven this to be the case.

If leaders want employees who are highly engaged and equally productive, they need to build a culture that enables employees to set boundaries and discourages continual overworking; all parties will benefit.

Now more than ever, having an engaged and productive workforce is vital to the health and success of any business. Following the steps above is a good start to ensuring your business will realise the benefit.

Do you have what it takes?

Effective leadership requires much more than a title, charisma, and bold ambition. Over the past decades, influence has shifted from the "few men in smoke-filled rooms" to the employees and customers of the business.

To enable companies to succeed, leaders need to focus on and learn from their customers, they need to invest in their employees to deliver market-leading performances, and they need to manage change in their organisations with careful precision and empathy for their people.

In a turbulent time of social and political unrest, an economy under pressure, and a persistent pandemic, strong leadership is needed at every level of the organisation, regardless of role and where you are in the organisational chart. Managers would do well to understand the principles outlined in this eBook and identify how they can be applied in your own organisation—we need it now more than ever!

About RingCentral

RingCentral, Inc. (NYSE: RNG) is a leading provider of unified communications (message, video, phone), customer engagement, and contact centre solutions for businesses worldwide. More flexible and cost-effective than legacy on-premises PBX and video conferencing systems that it replaces, RingCentral empowers modern mobile and distributed workforces to communicate, collaborate, and connect via any mode, any device, and any location. RingCentral's open platform integrates with leading third-party business applications and enables customers to easily customise business workflows. RingCentral is headquartered in Belmont, California, and has offices around the world.

For more information, please contact a sales representative. Visit **ringcentral.co.uk** or call **0800 098 8136**.

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