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BUSINESS ADVANCEMENT INC.®

## *The Harper Report:*

# Is Your Company Ready For Success?

Recently, we met with the CEO and senior executives of a company that was preparing to receive FDA approval of a number of new drug applications. Despite the prospect of imminent success after years of investment and waiting, these savvy leaders recognized that they needed to be ready to head off a possible crisis: effectively bringing a number of new products to market all at once while balancing their current product portfolio.

In fact, these executives are not alone in recognizing the challenges that success can bring. We've learned over the years that regardless of the size of a company, success can provoke its own type of crises. After the initial celebration subsides, it can be an unpleasant surprise to realize that the world really has changed and that long established operations must also change – sometimes dramatically - in order to accommodate growth and new expectations from customers, employees, and other stakeholders.

Whether your company's success happens suddenly or after a prolonged effort, anticipating and helping your organization adapt to the new reality of success can go a long way toward ensuring that the achievement is sustained and meets or exceeds expectations.

Here is a checklist of some useful guidelines:

### **Harness enthusiasm**

Especially after a major victory, it's common for everyone to want to quickly launch into action to exploit the immediate window of opportunity. While this enthusiasm is natural, we've seen that harnessing it to a coordinated strategy and action plan can help fend off problems such as unnecessary conflicts, mistakes, rework, and firefighting.

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It may seem counterintuitive, but laying the foundation for success by first gaining the perspectives of customers, employees, alliance partners, suppliers, and other stakeholders is the most important action step you can take. It ensures that your organization will have the resources, skills, ability and communication systems it needs to be effective and efficient, and will dramatically increase the odds that

your organization's enthusiasm will be rewarded by the lasting achievement you anticipate.

### **Identify Support and Resistance**

It's easy to see who your strongest supporters are as you engage the organization in moving a success forward – they're the ones who step forward and take initiative to move in the new direction. However, the next stage of support must be built by winning over key leaders in the organization who can positively influence groups and sub-groups at every level.

Keep in mind that the most powerful leaders are actually those who hold social influence and shape opinion, regardless of their position in the organization hierarchy. For instance, in one company, the clerk who dispensed office supplies was a powerful social leader and a nexus of informal communication, giving her influence way beyond her formal status.

In addition to identifying and building support, it's equally critical to identify and manage resistance as roles, accountabilities and responsibilities shift and new employees with special knowledge and skills are hired. In order to determine the best way to address resistance, you must know where it's coming from, why it's happening, and what its consequences may be.

Some of the most common reasons for resistance to positive change are: anger over real or perceived loss of power and control, discomfort with doing things differently, resentment over increased workload, fear of job loss, and generalize anxiety about the unknown.

As you engage leaders at all levels of the organization in helping you form and carry through on your plans for success you can leverage their influence to amplify your success.

### **Build Confidence**

Responding to success and the new opportunities for growth it brings can be challenging, as it usually means your organization is moving into uncharted territory.

When you can provide examples of how your organization has triumphed and overcome other challenges in the past, as well as provide concrete evidence that supports the progress being made in the here and now, your organization and external stakeholders are more likely to stay engaged and supportive.

Laying the foundation for success by developing a coordinated strategy and plan is the most important action step you can take.

For example, one of our clients who was experiencing extraordinary success was troubled by persistent low morale in the organization. When we discovered that many of the employees did not realize how well the company was actually doing (some even thought that the company was at risk of failing), the leadership team was able to respond by developing an effective communication plan that brought the whole company in on their success and plans, allowing them to accelerate to unprecedented growth and profitability. The more that people can see how their individual and group contributions are making a difference and are positively recognized, the more in control they will feel and the more committed they will be to helping changes succeed and follow through on your company's success.

### **Communicate Credibly**

A key factor in increasing employee and stakeholder support of the actions needed to insure that your success continues to bear fruit is the degree to which they believe in you and your leadership team – in other words, your credibility. A very large component of leadership credibility is the openness and consistency of communication. In times of uncertainty, people crave information. And with information readily accessible on the Internet, if

they don't get what they need from you, they'll get it from anyone or anything else that seems at all credible. Even if you don't have complete information, people will be more inclined to trust you if they can perceive a connection between what you're telling them and what they can readily observe happening around them.

Here's an example: one of our clients that was experiencing increased demand for their services found that they were able to substantially boost employee morale when leaders explained the reasons for all of the changes that were taking place and provided a timeline for when they would be able to communicate in greater detail on results and further steps. It is, of course, also critical that actions correspond to the communicated message, and that messages are consistent across the organization and external stakeholder groups.

There is no one best way to communicate with diverse groups and individuals. In the age of texting, Twitter, YouTube, etc. it's easy to believe that everyone communicates using the newest technology. However, I still meet people who don't have BlackBerrys or iPhones, who don't text each other, and prefer hard copy mail and magazines to email. The greater the variety of channels you use to communicate (both high tech and low tech), the more likely it is that you'll successfully connect with your stakeholders.

When your communication is seen as open as possible, in harmony with observable facts, and consistent across various audiences, you are far more likely to have the support you need to move forward.

### **Balance Focus with Flexibility**

Especially as the business landscape changes, it's critical to balance staying focused on your

vision with capitalizing on emerging opportunities and responding to emerging challenges. For example, you may need to shift priorities, eliminate some goals and establish others, find new resources, negotiate buy-in of new stakeholders, and set new criteria for measuring success. However, while some adjustments may be warranted, many aspects of the original strategy and plan may still have validity, so it's important to gauge what needs to be preserved as well as what must change to achieve a successful outcome.

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Setting periodic milestones and checkpoints along the way will help you stay on course while alerting you to large and small changes that require adjustment. Use concrete evidence rather than just opinion to determine whether the course needs to change.

### **The Bottom Line:**

The saying, "Be careful what you wish for – you just might get it" does *not* need to apply to your company. Recognizing that success brings challenges as well as opportunities, and applying the above guidelines to help you engage your organization and align capabilities will enable you head off unpleasant surprises and make the most of the new opportunities that lie ahead.



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### **About the authors:**

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