What to Do with Change Challenged Charlie

Servant Leadership has its Benefits

When you started leading people maybe you had the thought it was going to be easy, until you met Change Challenged Charlie. He’s that person on your team that needs the constant back and forth before he aligns to any nuanced change. And while you enjoy developing your people and that moment of inspiration you feel when you help people achieve their goals, the squeaky wheel can feel like an overwhelming challenge. You might prefer to look the other way and delve into the work at hand, placing an individual’s emotional needs a distant second. But research tells us that considering cognitive and emotional happiness enhances team performance, satisfaction, and is required to help Change Challenged Charlie become Change Champion Charlie.

Based on research performed by McKinsey consulting, “The fundamentals of boss/employee relationship start with mutual trust, encouragement, empathy and good communication. These attributes help to create an environment where team members feel psychologically safe” (i.e., the absence of interpersonal fear as a driver of employee behavior). Right now, you might be asking yourself; how do I create this type of environment? The answer to your question is known as servant leadership. Servant leadership focuses on the growth and well-being of their team members.

McKinsey Consulting research has identified three practices (or approaches) that servant leaders utilize to effectively create a psychologically safe environment. Let’s look at each one:

1. **Empathy:** The action of being aware, understanding, and being sensitive to another person’s past or present situation or circumstances and working to feel and experience them. It’s probably no great surprise that empathy is on the list and I’m sure, as a good leader, you didn’t need the formal definition. However, are you practicing it on the regular? Are you weaving it into your day? If you ask a personal question to someone, are you genuinely interested in what they have to say. This means you’re not looking at your phone, smart watch, thinking about what you must pick up at the store or judging their answer. Creating an empathetic environment is based on intentionality and doing so allows the team to feel safe when they have failed, have concerns or issues to share.
2. **Positivity:** Research indicates that providing positive reinforcement creates better performance than the worn-out method of stanch criticism. Encouragement, withholding judgement, praise, assuming positive intent all create the emotional connection that fosters confidence. More employee confidence means better work quality and engagement which benefit the team and organization. Finally, if you’re struggling to connect to this idea or deliver positive messages, then consider positivity your chance to give back where you and recipient reap the benefits.
3. **Gratitude:** A simple thank you goes a long way with people. At one time I had a boss who would say thank you for almost everything. Meeting with him. Brainstorming ideas. Facilitating a meeting. My initial response to his gratitude was “sure” or “of course” and to be completely transparent, a little part of me thought it was a little strange. However, later in the day or that week, I would find myself feeling valued. Celebrating small achievements is another form of gratitude. Now do you have to celebrate the fact that someone made it from their parking spot to their desk, of course not. But what about celebrating the small step someone took toward their stretch goal or how they handled a bossy customer? Think of kind words like pennies. While they seem insignificant by themselves, putting them together brings value.

Now that you know about these three practices, let’s think about Change Challenged Charlie. By leveraging these practices, Charlie perceives compassion and kindness from you. This does several things:

1. Creates a better working relationship for each of you.
2. Creates greater job satisfaction for Charlie and loyalty to you.
3. Charlie’s “no way” response to change becomes an “okay” and he increases productivity.

Okay, let’s summarize this and get you on your way with three quick points:

1. As a leader, you have the greatest opportunity to influence change.
2. Creating the right environment doesn’t need to be done on a grand scale. Micro dosing works really well and after all, you can only ask someone “how ya do’n” so many times per day.
3. To begin creating a safe environment, start with one of the ideas above and then add the next after you have mastered the first.

Good luck and remember another Change Challenged Charlie will likely pop up at some point in the future. But now you know how to give that squeaky wheel a little grease.

**BIO** – Eric Currie is on a quest to coach leaders on how to maximize their team’s emotional relationship to change. This type of connection creates better results and helps them to make a difference in their organization and team. As a certified change practitioner, Eric wants to utilize his experience to make change easier. To learn more and/or download your complimentary “Ready to Go” change articles visit EricCurrie.com.

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