

Smarter Leadership

The first of two analyses about ways to chart change.

by Laura Stone

Executives spend time in four main areas of the business: leadership, talent pipeline, the inner workings of the business, and new and existing clients. What percentage of time do you dedicate to each of these areas and in what priority? Given your priorities, does this need to shift, and how?

Consider shifting your thinking to, “What method, process, or approach would work best for my team, even though my preferred approach might be different?” This shift from self to others is essential for helping negotiate transformation. If you already attempt this, try to apply the thinking more broadly.

For example, suppose that you believe headhunters are best for personal career paths. But what if headhunters help build the best possible talent pipeline? Developing strategically focused relationships with a few targeted headhunters will provide new value.

For smarter leadership in changing organizations, remember that, “what got you to where you are today might not get you to where you need to be.” Successful transformation requires a twofold shift. The first shift is learning to embrace the global, enterprisewide integration,

while making decisions for your own business. In *The Primes*, Chris McGoff calls this “big hat” (enterprisewide) and “little hat” (group-specific) decision-making. The second shift is getting comfortable with leading by influence, rather than through “owning” the people.

Though time-consuming, both in-person contact and communications are critical as teams form. Consider holding monthly in-person, all-day or half-day leadership team meetings. These will enable you to work with your team to develop shared priorities while understanding their individual needs.

Taking the time to figure out a few, essential initiatives will provide team focus. Having shared ownership and collaborating on approach is invaluable. It brings the team closer and makes them more productive. Equally important, team members will get to know you better and understand your expectations, helping them more actively manage the business.

After a time, you might be able to reduce meeting frequency or duration. However, many high-performing, highly matrixed global organizations hold monthly



Laura Stone is CEO of Stone + Company, which helps leaders and their teams problem-solve the most socially complex issues and opportunities to deliver results they can be proud of. Her firm achieves this by transforming fragmented groups and/or strategies into a cohesive system with a crisp, focused plan for achieving superior performance and true team alignment FAST.

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meetings precisely because they find it essential to success.

A tempo to these meetings will develop. During the first meeting, you will need one to two days to align priorities. The purpose of the next meeting will be to finalize details, because in the interim you will have had a subcommittee “testing and measuring” the work with their direct reports and/or you will have worked with other leaders to ensure alignment with enterprisewide initiatives. Twice a year, you will need to work through talent pipeline topics as a team. Larry Bossidy’s book *Execution* notes that having a frequently shared focus on the talent topic is essential because the leadership team needs to share resources, then prioritize and invest in them. The focus of the remaining meetings will be determined by priorities and events. These conversations, at least initially, need time and your personal touch. They are too important to be done any other way.

Consider separating out content and process; by process, we mean scheduling meetings even if you don’t yet know the agenda.

High-performing executives know that everything is more complex than it initially seems and takes longer than anticipated. By having these meeting times carved out 12 months in advance, you’ll reduce your team’s anxiety and increase your ability to plan, react, and adjust.

Provide support for clarifying annual objectives, forming your leadership team’s priorities, and developing a road map. Teams need time together to form, storm, norm, and ultimately perform. Every time a new team member is added, priorities change, or an environmental factor impacts the organization. These events set the team back a stage and require your attention. The more mature the team, the faster it passes through these stages, but neglecting any one of them can cause confusion and inefficiencies.

As a smarter leader, first announce your decision to proceed with program implementation, and then provide support for implementing the initiatives. Each of the initiative owners will need support to define what “done” looks like in 90 days, work through the chartering process, and ensure they are guiding behaviors that drive to the desired values and culture. You will need to have monthly review and planning sessions with “lane drivers” and the project manager to ensure progress and cross-pollinate learning.

Since you will be a sponsor for this work, remember that the initiative owners need access to you, perhaps biweekly, even if it is just for 30 minutes. On a regular basis, communicate to share news about successes and progress, as well as new initiatives.



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781 383 8383 | www.stoneandcompany.com | 164 Chief Justice Cushing Way, Cohasset, MA 02025