

**From the Sacramento Business Journal:**

<http://www.bizjournals.com/sacramento/stories/2007/01/08/smallb3.html>

**Got Growth?**

## **Change can be rewarding journey with solid leadership, training**

**Let employees know what to expect; offer incentives for reaching goals**

**Premium content from Sacramento Business Journal - by Larry Mandelberg**

Date: Sunday, January 7, 2007, 9:00pm PST

Standing near the edge of a high cliff, you look across the horizon. Off in the distance you see the destination you want to reach.

As you scan the horizon, your eyes end up back near your feet looking down into the depths just a few steps ahead of you. The drop-off is deep, so deep it is hard to see the bottom, it is dark, and there is only one path to your destination -- over the edge and down. And you ask yourself, "How will I ever get there? It is too deep, too dangerous, too far away."

A feeling of uneasiness begins to creep over you, and you feel a rock in the pit of your stomach.

That is exactly the way your staff feels when you tell them change is on the way.

### **Convey the Message**

Let's use the letter "J" as a metaphor for the journey. The cliff you are standing on is at the edge of the short side of the J, the curve of the J is the pit, or the unknown, and the point you want to get to is all the way up at the top of the tall side of the J.

People will look up and see what might be, but most will focus on the cliff and the pit just in front of them. As the leader, your job is to help your team walk right up to the edge, get them focused on tomorrow (the place in the distance you want to lead them to), create desire to go there with you and help them begin the journey.

Metaphorically speaking, you need a telescope and a ladder. The ladder is the beginning of the journey down into the darkness of the unknown and ill-prepared. As they say in the movies, it's the fall that will kill you. Getting back up the other side will be the least of your worries.

### **Into the Chasm**

Start training before you start changing. Explain the value of the change and how it will have a positive impact on everyone. Go over the process step by step and make it clear mistakes will be made. After all, this is going to be new for everyone.

Creating a sense of what will happen is the only protection you can offer. Your best and brightest will suffer from fear of failure, while the others will simply feel powerless and useless, and that is before you even begin.

Look for those who see your vision and embrace it -- they will be your champions. Enlist them as guides and start rewarding people immediately just for starting whether they like it or not. It doesn't have to be expensive or elaborate, and it should be fun.

Look for small milestones that are easily achievable and give rewards for reaching them. The more you can give people a sense of accomplishment, the more they will be willing to move forward into unfamiliar territory.

### **From the dark to the light**

When you hit the bottom of the curve, you are ready to start climbing toward your goals. The territory will be foreign, the language unfamiliar, and most won't recognize good from bad. People will feel as though they are wandering around in the dark with little or no direction. Rewards for small successes are critical at this stage, and as people start to climb up the other side (embracing the change), remember that mistakes will be made.

This is not a time to be a perfectionist or overly critical. It is the time to recognize that people make mistakes, which is what makes them human. Use those mistakes as learning opportunities and capture the stories that make them funny and compelling.

As you progress, people will stop focusing on the steepness of the climb and start focusing on the reaching the destination. Remind them of the rewards at the end of the journey, and keep them focused forward.

By this time, everyone will have gone through a lot of emotional turmoil and frustration. New skills will have been learned, and old habits will need to be broken. Once again, rewards are your most powerful tool. There is no success too small to celebrate, no failure

so large it should dominate.

### **Finish with a bang**

When you reach your destination and the changes you have implemented are in place, stop and have the team reflect on where they were and how far they have come. Show them how the rewards you promised came true and the suffering they feared was much worse than the reality they experienced. Challenge them to be ready for more change and to find creative ways to make the next journey more fun (because it will be more challenging).

Being successful in business today demands playing to your strengths and constantly looking for ways to change and be better. The world moves so fast, it can seem like we barely have time to catch our breath before we are forced into another journey of change and dealing with new, unexpected demands and pressures. If you approach it from that perspective, it becomes labor, tedious and oppressive.

If you can find a way to look at change as an opportunity to be better without losing your strengths and knowledge, change becomes a thoroughly enjoyable experience.

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