

Leadership Barometer 141 Continuous Improvement

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



To understand the value of continuous improvement, you simply need to verify that you are always going in the right direction. I like the following quote by Lao Tzu, "If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading."

Many groups get stuck trying to anticipate all of the twists and turns that are possible. They end up spending inordinate amounts of time ruling out things that are not going to happen in reality.

Pay Attention to Where You Are Going

As I reflect on the issue of change and continuous improvement, I have an additional insight that may be helpful. We do not need to worry about the myriad of decisions required to get where we are going. Rather, all we need to do is verify we are heading in the right direction. That will free us from over-planning and allow our creativity to determine the exact pathway to our future.

The wonderful thing about a vision is that it pulls us along from one revelation to the next one. We simply need to remain true to the vision and verify that each decision points in the right direction. The rest of the journey will take care of itself.

What's Important Now

Lou Holtz uses the word WIN, which stands for "What's Important Now." It allows him to focus on the vision and do the right thing at every step to take him in that direction. He does not worry or hope or fret about all the details, he simply asks if what we are doing right now is consistent with the vision. If it is, then the step is correct.

Continuous improvement is the same way. We do not need to psychoanalyze all possible avenues ahead of time. We can take actions immediately as long as we are pointed in the direction we wish to go, and we will eventually achieve our goals.

Avoid Analysis Paralysis

Some people will say, "Yes, but what if there is a better choice, then you might miss the opportunity to do that." People who continually say "Yes, but..." can find themselves searching for the ultimate perfect path and die from analysis paralysis or starvation. It is far better to step out on the right path and keep moving toward the goal than spend years searching for the perfect route.

Example from Brian Tracy

In his video, "Success is a Journey," the great Brian Tracy recalls how, as a young man, he traveled from Vancouver all the way to South Africa with some friends. It took them over a year to do it. The most harrowing part of the journey was when he crossed the Sahara Desert in Africa. For one 500 mile stretch called the Tanezrouft, the path was marked by oil barrels every 5 kilometers. It turns out that that is exactly the curvature of the Earth, so at any time he could see exactly two oil barrels: the one he just passed and the one directly in front of him.

As soon as he would pass one oil barrel, the one behind him would disappear and a new one would pop up on the horizon in front of him. The way he crossed the most dangerous desert on the planet was by taking it one oil barrel at a time.

Conclusion

It is the same with reaching any difficult goal. You can do it by simply making sure you are heading in the right direction and taking it one oil barrel at a time. I believe that is a good way to visualize continuous improvement and a great model for achieving your goals in life.

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