

Application Guide

LEADING THROUGH LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS WITH GAVIN ADAMS



BOTTOM LINE:

If we ignore what people feel during a leadership transition, we cannot effectively lead them into and through the transition.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- I. When you transition into a leadership role you will inherit everything that is already there: emotions of employees, history of the organization, systems you didn't create but have been created, organizational culture, etc.
- II. Any leadership transition has emotion throughout the process simply because change in itself is hard. Yet many leaders fail to lead through it well because they fail to pay attention to the emotional side of the people they lead.
 - A. Everything in an organization happens in, with, and through people, so leaders in a leadership transition must focus on the person rather than the steps they want to see taken.
 - B. When you are able to name an emotion an individual is feeling they will build trust with you because they feel understood. As trust is built the steps you want to see will be accomplished.
 - C. You cannot change what you cannot name.
- III. There are four emotional states of a transition:
 - A. **Comfort:** People are creatures of comfort, but the moment a boss looks at the team and says there is going to be a change that comfort is lost immediately.
 1. Even if things haven't been going well, the transition of a leader stirs up discomfort and fear because there becomes a great deal of unknown.
 - a) People are looking to maximize their personal predictability.
 - b) People think predictable bad is better than possible better.
 2. As a new leader coming into an organization, the challenge is to confront the idea that comfort has been dislodged for the moment.
 - B. **Grief:** During a transition, individuals are not only starting something new, but also closing something old.
 1. Transitions create new beginnings, but only after an end—individuals still there lost something.
 2. When things change, people don't resist the change itself, they resist the loss associated with the change.
 3. If you don't grieve a loss, it will be buried alive and never be put to rest, ultimately leading to future tensions.
 - a) When things are changing ask individuals, "What do you feel like you are losing?"
 - b) As a leader try to determine who will lose what before you announce the change.
 - C. **Confusion:** In transition there is a state of confusion, but it's not necessarily a bad thing. It's proof that individuals are letting go of what they used to know but aren't sure how things are going to work moving forward.
 1. In this state, new leaders are in a position to innovate and create something new.

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2. If people won't let go of what was, then new systems will be very difficult to implement. As they are in this state of letting go, small wins will begin to accumulate and lead to something new.

D. **Acclimation:** Otherwise known as the new normal within organizational culture.

1. This comes after a new leader has been established for a little while and can identify the values that are driving the new culture.
2. Values birth beliefs, which drive the behaviors throughout your organization.
3. The key for leaders is to reinforce the new way the organization operates and people will grow accustomed to it.

IV. The better we understand people, where they are, and what they are feeling, the better we can lead them to where they could be.

A. Behavior modification is a short-term solution.

B. Identify the preferred destination, but then back up to where people are on the journey and assure them that what they are feeling is normal.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR TEAM DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever experienced a major leadership transition? What was that like for you personally and how did it affect the organization as a whole?
2. What specifically do you find uncomfortable about change?
3. Why do you think behavior modification is only a short-term solution to workplace frustrations?
4. If your current team were to experience a leadership transition today, what would each of you lose?

RESOURCES MENTIONED

[Big Shoes to Fill](#) by Gavin Adams

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