

Tips on leading successful change

Baljeet Mahal, 12 June 2014 - [Leading and managing change](#)

London Bridge Job Centre Plus evolution began in 2012 when it was selected to be a showcase office of the future. The principle of the change was to pave the way for DWP's "Digital by Default" strategy, build capability of customers and highlight what the future holds for Job Centre Plus services. The positive change was demonstrated through in the recent People Survey, when the site scored 81% for Leading and Managing change.

Listen to your staff and hold regular forums where it is safe for them to air their concerns. It is important to take these concerns on board and explain why the change needs to happen in the bigger picture context – how will it make their job easier or provide additional support to our customers?

Utilise your people group and truly engage with your staff. Our People Matters Group (PMB) is a voluntary group of employees who come together to make the work environment better. They have a representative from each team who meet regularly without management attendance, but share their agenda and minutes with the management team so that we are aware of any concerns.

Anything that comes from management can often be seen as a direction – we did not want that. PMB allows us to cascade change with a “hands-off” approach, it is bottom-up and led by the workforce. These regular meetings allow employees to air their concerns or shape a new way of doing things without management intervention.

Thank your team members. We fully utilise our reward and recognition each year to show our appreciation to our teams. Each month employees are awarded at our office meetings; colleagues are asked to nominate a colleague for either a financial or certificate of appreciation. However, if a team has felt that they have achieved something collectively they can submit a team nomination to be put forward for an award.

Keep your people informed and when possible make sure that you have cascaded the message to them. They need to know what is happening and with as much detail as possible. Ensure that they do not feel restricted to ask questions – encourage it. In front of customers we have to remain professional and not offer a personal view, but when we hold an office forum or during 121's, I want people to be honest. This allows team

members to air their views and the leadership team to explain the context that might have been lost in an email for example.

Mix it up. There is a good social life in the office which has impacted positively on the dynamics of the workforce. There are no cliques in the office which has been helped by having a cross section of people together for different work strands. This brings people together from all floors and all teams. Leaders move around regularly in the office so they are visible across the site.

Furthermore, all members of staff can work across each team meaning they can support other teams under increasing demand. Initially there was resistance to being flexible across the site, mainly due to anxiety about skills needed but each leader explained that they have had to develop to improve their quality of service. Now we see ourselves as one big London Bridge team rather than individual ones.

Don't be embarrassed to hold up your hands and own up if something has gone wrong. Set the example for being accountable for something. In this office, staff are quick to highlight if something has gone wrong and the leadership team accept their feedback and build on it.

It is the small things that count the most, even the quick "thank you". Daily we check the referrals that our teams have made and acknowledge their efforts in an all staff email; this on-going recognition spurs action and they are quick to follow up if I have missed anyone off the list!

Leadership is not about management in its entirety. It is about leading by example and being a role model. Not just at a senior level but colleagues across the grade mix should lead by example and be an ambassador for what they do.

Communication is a core skill of leadership, especially during change. You have to be comfortable talking and adapting messages to suit the audience. Ensure that you understand the change yourself as if you don't – neither will they and they may lose faith in your leadership vision. It is essential that you communicate your vision as a leader and build enthusiasm around what it means for them, thinking about the practicalities and how as a team you can overcome any potential concerns.

Know the business and keep your practical skills and be ready to support the team if they need it. For example, all the leaders in London Bridge JCP can advise and interview customers because we have maintained our skills on the business tools. This increases credibility within your team and maintains the service to our customers.

Give a little bit of yourself as sometimes it takes a while to build the relationship with your team members but by sharing a little bit of your story it encourages them to share theirs with you. For example, explain when you found something difficult or were anxious, this can help them relate to the situation and move forward. In short, I went through this change and got through it, now I am here to support you with your change anxiety. Finally, encourage discussions about non-business matters during your 121's – it takes time for people to open up to you and build confidence and they are a good forum to start this process.

