

Professional Preparation!

By Bill Dickerson

With the New Millennium but a few months away, it's safe to say that the 90's will go down in history as the 'Decade of Change.' However, if the last few years are any indication of what we have to look forward to, as 70's recording artists, Bachman Turner Overdrive, once surmised, we 'Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet.'

Yes, Change – management consultant's favorite buzzword for the 90's will be even more evident in the coming decade, and the way in which we position ourselves and our organizations to deal with this change will play a major role in determining our ultimate success, or lack thereof.

You realize, of course, that it's we babyboomers, known best for our questioning of everything as students of the 60's, who are responsible for this rapid change. That's right, for even though technology pioneers like Bill Gates were mere toddlers in the 60's, it's babyboomers like us who are now running the country and responsible for (and dealing with) change.

So accept it! Though it's not always positive, and is quite often resisted by those around us, change is inevitable, and, without doubt, will become the byword for the New Millennium. The more prepared we are to deal with it, the better our chances for success, or should we say survival? Therefore, let's take a look at some of those skills and traits that will help us to deal more effectively with the inevitable Changes of the next decade. What CAN we do to help ensure our success? Consider the following:

Develop A Passion – for your job that is second to none. After all, passion is at the core of all great things, and something that comprises more than 50% of your waking hours darn well better be enjoyable, otherwise you might want to seriously consider changing professions. Many of us in Auxiliary Services happen to believe that we have the best jobs on campus and, more often than not, this tends to show in our performance.

Conversely, for those who view their jobs less enthusiastically – don't think that that doesn't get noticed as well. Enthusiasm IS contagious – and even though it doesn't ALWAYS produce the desired results, the process itself makes for a more enjoyable and better end product.

Value People – for without them, the future is extremely limiting, and could be quite lonely as well. Management guru, Tom Champoux has been stressing for years that successful organizations are those that value people as the critical link to achieving long-term success. Clearly, the bottom line for those organizations that fail to recognize this is tenuous, at best. Become known as the most caring person in the world...you won't regret it.

Also, it's important to recognize that a leader's success will be judged by the performance of those around him or her. As such, take great care to reward others whenever possible and your own recognition will come in due time. Always give credit where credit is due and always accept responsibility without casting blame. People DO notice, and in a world of rapid change, it is traits such as these that will be recognized and rewarded.

Develop Core Values – of right from wrong and listen to your gut whenever challenged by those around you, including your boss. Even though the

workplace is not always black and white as our accountants might like us to believe, there really is very little gray. Most tough decisions (*e.g. should I or shouldn't I?*) can be broken down into the simplest of terms. Would I want to see this on the front page of tomorrow's newspaper? If the answer is no, then make the right decision and stick to your guns, no matter what. In the long run, you won't regret it.

But what if it's your boss that's expecting you to do something that you know is inherently wrong? Well, it certainly complicates things, but life is filled with little tests such as these, and how we respond goes a long way toward determining our future success. Is it too trite to suggest that, in the end, each one of us will get exactly what we deserve from life? I don't think so. Trust your gut and you'll do fine. Even bosses sometimes need to be reminded of the obvious.

Take Risks – and, most importantly, encourage risk-taking throughout the entire organization. As once noted by Confucius, *"Even the turtle fails to make progress, unless he sticks his neck out."* Does your organization reward risk taking, or discourage it? When risk taking is rewarded you are prepared to accept the fact that mistakes, and sometimes even failure, will result. But so what? Do you think that the Wright Brothers succeeded in their first attempt to fly? And did you know that, at the age of 56, Abraham Lincoln was finally elected 16th President of the United States, after having lost his previous eight attempts to seek public office?

An organization that discourages risk taking is in danger of becoming complacent and, hence, ill prepared to deal with adversity. Instead, reward risk taking, and accept the fact that an occasional failure is essential and merely a stepping stone to future success.

Skills for the Next Decade

Embrace Faculty & Students – for without them, where would we be? In auxiliary services, our very name epitomizes the general purpose for our being. But do we really believe that? Do those of us responsible for bookstores really understand that developing close ties with faculty is essential to our success? Think about it. Where will your store be if the faculty doesn't understand the important role that your store plays on campus when Internet sellers start undercutting the bookstore? Will your faculty be encouraging students to buy from the campus store because all profits remain on campus, and because the store is here to serve the needs of the entire campus, not just the major sections for which books may be available over the Internet? Or will they be encouraging students to get the books from wherever they can? Obviously, the former is preferable, but is by no means automatic. And developing such an understanding among faculty is essential to achieving your goal.

Likewise, don't forget your students. If you begin to take students for granted, you are surely doomed to failure. They are the very reason that we exist, and the more often that you and your staff remember that, the greater your success. Students, by their very nature are creatures of change. Make sure that you and your entire organization are there to anticipate and address those changes.

Embrace Technology – Champion its ongoing development within your entire organization and University. Encourage technological investment in both people and equipment. Since the office of tomorrow will indeed become paperless, jump on the technology bandwagon and do your best to remain current.

By this, I'm not necessarily suggesting that we each become experts in technology. But I do believe it's impor-

tant that we do our best to provide an environment in which technology is both welcomed and encouraged. That we support our Information Systems Departments in their efforts to get and keep us connected. And most importantly, that we remain alert to what's happening around us. Internet booksellers will NOT go away, so accept it, and deal with it, or be left behind.

Hire Good People – provide substantial training and support from the beginning, then get out of the way! Sounds simple, doesn't it, but as we all know, things are rarely as easy as they sound. However, it's a proven fact that employee turnover can be a major expense to many organizations. Therefore it behooves us to take more time in the hiring process to recruit the best people available and make a substantial commitment to make certain that they receive the maximum level of support. Without a doubt, time spent in the beginning comes back tenfold in terms of future contributions to the organization. With changes developing at a never-ending pace, the last thing you want to do is waste precious time needlessly filling the same position again a few months later.

And while you're at it, relish the innate curiosity of beginners and encourage its development throughout their careers. It's often the simplest of questions that leads to the most remarkable results. Encourage, don't discourage those who dare to challenge the boss with a sincere question.

Embrace Diversity – and actively encourage its acceptance throughout, for it adds so much to the overall quality of any organization. Do it enthusiastically and consistently, but, most importantly, make it explicitly clear to those who don't happen to share your vision that change is in order (and expected). Hopefully, the day is near when one's gender or heritage or the color of one's

skin won't even be noticed in the workplace (or anywhere else for that matter). But until that day arrives, each of us needs to do all we can to embrace and develop diversity.

Know Yourself – especially your weaknesses, and use that information to strengthen your team. Assessment tools such as the Myers-Briggs Analysis can do wonders to help people understand behavior. And when it's used throughout an entire management team as a means of sharing insights into what makes people tick, the results can be astounding. By learning more about people's comfort zone it becomes easier to understand why people do the things they do. For example, as an ENTJ (according to Myers-Briggs) I was able to relate to our entire management team that ENTJ's thrived on challenge but could not condone sycophants. From that day forward, each and every member of the team knew that the boss openly encouraged being challenged, and communication throughout the organization improved immediately. But regardless of one's profile, a sharing of styles, especially among management, can do wonders to improve communication and better prepare your organization to deal with change.

Question Authority – albeit with respect, and don't hesitate to offer suggestions. (Embarrassing the boss, however, is not recommended.) Think back to when you were in school. Remember how teachers seemed drawn to those students who appeared interested and asked questions? Well, the circumstances may have changed, but human instincts remain the same, even outside the classroom. Leaders enjoy and appreciate knowing that those around them are interested in the issues at hand. Raising sincere questions and offering suggestions is an effective means of demonstrating such interest.

Question Information – especially the accuracy, of everything we receive from those around us. If we make a habit of accepting everything we receive as fact, it's only a matter of time before we find ourselves conveying misinformation, and where does that leave us? The accompanying degree of embarrassment is inversely proportionate to the degree to which we accept responsibility for the inaccuracy in the first place. Rapid change means more information than we know what to do with, but don't let the volume of information serve as an excuse not to question its accuracy. It could, and likely will, come back to haunt you.

Excel at Communication – both verbal and written. To illustrate the point, when was the last time you heard a CEO give a terrible speech? It doesn't happen very often because, more and more, organizations are turning to leaders who are adept at public speaking and, at least, somewhat comfortable with being in the limelight.

What about written communication? The written word can either enhance one's standing or expose one's weaknesses and obviously, it's the former for which we should strive.

And how's your typing (or keyboarding)? The old days of dictating to a secretary or even a Dictaphone are somewhat akin to the Dark Ages of office communication. The development of the Internet and the proliferation of e-mail, with its capability of communicating the same message simultaneously to multiple locations, is here to stay. Voice recognition software allows us to talk to our computers and see the words appear on the screen, but don't let that fool you. Learn to fluidly navigate your way around a keyboard and you will not regret it. Rapid change requires good communication skills so don't be needlessly left out when the solution is so readily available.

Micromanage – yes, micromanage, but do it selectively. Teamwork and working together are essential ingredients to achieving any significant degree of success in any endeavor. But as tempting as it might be to show your unwavering support for your team, regardless of the circumstances, there are times, when it simply is just not deserved. Should you falsely defend a

mistake in judgment from a team member simply to show support for the team? Hopefully not (though you should accept responsibility for the error and do whatever is necessary to reduce the likelihood of a repeat occurrence.) In a world of rapid change, you can't afford to waste time defending the indefensible. Learn to distinguish the differences between supporting the team and improving the team.

Maintain Good Health – and encourage those around you to do the same! Did you ever notice that successful people rarely miss work because of illness? It's true, and one of the key reasons is that most leaders tend to maintain reasonably good health. It's also a proven fact that healthy people are better able to fight off many of the routine illnesses that can sometimes cripple an entire organization. So eat right, and make time (in your already, busy schedule) for some form of regular exercise at least three times/week. The payoffs are subtle, but indeed, substantial and will better enable you to deal with rapid change.

Become Active Professionally – or else seriously consider making a career change at the earliest opportunity! A little drastic, you say? Well, think back for a moment to when you first joined the field. Did you ever come across a problem that you were reasonably sure was not unique to your campus? Of course you did, and you either plunged ahead and figured it out for yourself, or you turned to a colleague in the profession whom you learned may have already addressed a similar problem. Ninety-nine percent of the time, you found that colleague not only helpful, but also, enthusiastic about sharing what he/she had learned to help a colleague.

Yes, sharing is almost a byword among auxiliary service professionals, and what better way to share than to become involved in NACAS, your professional association? The very essence of associations such as NACAS is the enhancement and professional development of our members through both educational programs and networking opportunities. And it's the

continuing involvement of professionals like you that keeps the process fresh. From the perspective of one who's been there in several different professional organizations, I can assure you, the intrinsic rewards derived from professional involvement far outweigh the costs in terms of time. Get involved – it DOES make a difference!

Conclusion

There you have it, the musings of an aging colleague who is rapidly approaching his 30th anniversary in Auxiliary Services, but somewhat ironically, one who still tends to think of himself as one of the youngest people on campus. And with this final point, it occurs to me that the single most important trait that will separate the wheat from the chaff in the new millennium is ATTITUDE!

Yes, **Attitude Is Everything** – especially when it comes to dealing with change. Is your glass half-full? Or do you always fear the worst? Perhaps you feel that neither really applies, in which case I would ask with whom do you like to associate? Positive, creative perhaps even fun loving people or negative sourpusses who literally drain the energy from others? The answer is clear: attitude IS everything and the better your attitude, the greater your chances for success, no matter how great the challenges of the decade ahead.

You've survived all the changes of the 90's. Now it's time to thrive midst the impending changes of the New Millennium. After all, the next decade will only come around once – and you deserve to make the most of it! ♦

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