

# Work with Beliefs



Effective leaders foster certain beliefs by creating experiences.

**E**FFECTIVE LEADERS work at the level of people's beliefs. This goes deeper than declaring a new result as the target and issuing a plan of action to reach that get. It goes to the way people think and about the result and their on-the-job actions.

Effective leaders help people to make the connection between what they're doing on the job and the organization needs to achieve.

## **Why Beliefs Matter**

The Results Pyramid is a model of culture that shows how experiences foster beliefs, beliefs drive actions, and actions produce results. Culture is a sum of what people think and do, their beliefs and actions, in a given

group. Every group, team, division, and organization has a culture. Effective leaders lead by managing the culture. Trying to lead people to achieve new results by announcing goals and action plans is ineffective.

## **The Power of Experience**

To exercise leadership you must create experiences that foster the beliefs you want your people to hold. Those beliefs must be the ones that will drive the actions that will produce the results you want.

Leaders cannot change people's beliefs by request or decree. Beliefs change as a result of experiences. So leaders must always be aware of the experiences they create for people.

One CEO told his senior managers, "Everyday, in everything you do, you leave a footprint on this place." His manner understood: Be sure you create the

right experiences for your people because, for better or worse, we as leaders are always creating experiences, and those experiences are always creating beliefs.

With regard to creating beliefs, we've identified four types of experiences:

1. A meaningful event that leads to an immediate insight. This experience requires no interpretation to convey a belief. For instance, if a management team takes a salary cut during a cost-control effort, people will believe they're serious about controlling costs.

2. An event that requires some interpretation to foster the desired belief. For example if, to make meetings more efficient, you stick to tight schedules and agendas, you should explain that this reflects a belief in efficient meetings. Otherwise, people could believe you simply want to limit discussion.

That has no effect on how people perceive these events as insignificant. Unfortunately when a leadership team announces a mission statement and sticks to it in the cafeteria, it often amounts to this type of experience.

4. An event that will be misinterpreted no matter how hard someone tries to explain

it. We know a company which, in the midst of budget cuts and layoffs, hung an expensive modern art painting in the lobby. Although management explained that the painting had been commissioned a year before to beautify the workplace, employees were terribly upset.

As a leader, you must know which type of experience you are creating. If you know that hanging a painting will create the wrong belief no matter what, you could donate it to charity.

Leaders cannot lead by action plans alone. The most effective leaders work at the level of people's beliefs by creating certain experiences for their people. Experiences foster beliefs that motivate actions that produce results. EE

