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This quarterly newsletter features topics related to managing change and improving our work environments. If there are topics you would like to see covered or feedback you have about this newsletter, please submit your ideas and feedback to the following link: <http://www.anneoffner.com/contact.htm>

As I reflect on 2009 I will say the obvious; it was challenging. Every year has its ups and downs, but 2009 in particular was difficult for those who lost jobs, could not provide fully for their families, or in general, suffered through the economic malaise.

In my consulting practice 2009 was a year of adjustment and surprises. I worked from home more this year than in previous years. At lunch time I often walked up to the local grocery store just to have a conversation with someone other than my dog! I also had several last-minute requests for my services in 2009 which resulted in satisfying work and happy clients. Coaching people and working with other consultants across a variety of industries this year leads me to make the following observations:

Success is possible. While many companies laid-off employees or closed all together, some organizations actually did well. One client told me he planned not to mention the bonus he received this year. His company happens to be going strong in this economy but he knows other people who have been suffering financially and so he keeps his good fortune to himself and schedules time

to talk with friends who are looking for jobs or concerned about potential job losses.

Practice is worth the effort. This year, I observed clients in a variety of organizations make changes to old habits. Some changed the way they listen to or invite input from others, while others wanted to better organize their meeting requests and agendas or assert themselves into important conversations. And others had to learn to confront bad behavior from co-workers. Honestly, I didn't see the economy stymie clients in this area. Those who genuinely wanted to create a new habit did so by setting goals, practicing new skills, and, of course, listening to feedback when what they tried didn't work out so well.

Relationships are important. It's true in my own consulting practice – in 4 ½ years the majority of my business has come through word-of-mouth and work from repeat clients. As clients struggled through their own challenges this year, a common thread was their need to build stronger connections with their boss, direct reports, customers, and others. The most common suggestion I offered to coaching clients in this regard was to ask more questions. By asking a few probing questions we can often get a better feel for the other person's needs, wants, values, or overall point of view. As I suggest to clients, effective leaders ask effective

questions. Can you think of a leader you want to emulate who never asked for your point of view?

Watch out for stonewalling. Regardless of the economy I've observed clients' abilities to stonewall a change effort across every year of my professional life. This is the opposite of building relationships. People who stonewall are not sure that a change is in their own best interest and so they work behind the scenes to avoid making changes that are being asked of them. This year is no different – stonewallers are alive and well in the executive ranks as well as middle management. It's never an easy hill to climb but if you choose to work your way through to the stonewaller, put your best relationship building skills to work. You might also want to consider the advice of Fisher and Ury in their book *Getting to Yes*. For example, they suggest that we avoid assuming it's a personal problem (e.g., that the person is just stuck in his ways or wants to protect his turf). Instead uncover the issues that are causing him to stonewall (e.g., maybe his boss is pressuring him to keep the status quo or perhaps he is worried the IT systems won't support the change).



As each New Year begins we embrace the continuous procession into the unknown. Here are some thoughts on this New Year:

Practice sincerity. 2010 is likely to be a challenging year as downsized friends seek

new jobs, corporate "survivors" cope with a heavy workload, and business owners step cautiously into the marketplace. We may all have days when a pal's sincere offer to listen or provide advice will bring us back into balance. And if we happen to have success this year, take personal satisfaction in this while reaching a hand out to those who might need our support. As an added bonus, sincerity can be a building block to a strong relationship. In the competitive business environment a trusted relationship is a valuable asset.

Change something that needs changing. Maybe it's a habit that is keeping you from being successful at work. Maybe it's a household chore that your spouse wants you to "own". Maybe it's a habit your kids want you to change. Whatever it is, pick one and practice a new behavior until you've changed your habit. It may take 30 days, or it may be your project for entire year. Either way, I promise that if you choose a new behavior, practice it, listen for feedback, adjust when you need to, and keep at it, someone will notice and recognize your effort. If people don't start to notice, call me and I'll talk with you for free!

Practice gratitude. Find at least one thing to be grateful for each day. It might be the same thing each day or you may find multiple sources for your gratitude. Take 60 seconds on your drive home to reflect on this. If you're having trouble getting started, here's one off my gratitude list: Highway 40 is finally upgraded so be grateful instead of engaging in road rage!

Happy New Year everyone!

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