

## Leading Through Transition

Last weekend I returned home from a month in Ecuador. The focus of my trip was a climbing expedition to some of the most remote and beautiful volcanoes in the world towering between 16,000 - 20,000 feet above sea level. My time in Ecuador was marked with excitement, adventure, and challenge as our climbing team dealt with deteriorating weather and dangerous avalanche conditions. Through all of that, I enjoyed the serenity of being removed from everyday life and focused on climbing. My routine changed from reading the daily Wall Street Journal to arising at anywhere between 11:00pm and 2:00am to make our summit attempts.

As I transition home after traveling through a third-world country, I am overwhelmed with an immense amount of gratitude for all that I have. And I also come home experiencing anxiety as the overload of information about layoffs, stimulus plans, and bailouts seems never ending.

As I reflect on my experience and continue talk to clients across a broad sector of industries, more than ever I realize that we need leaders who can help their people and their organizations navigate through these times of rapid and turbulent change. I am not talking about the kind of leaders who earn \$67.5 million dollars in a year and then lead their employees, shareholders, and customers into the ditch. I am talking about authentic, people-focused leaders.

During times of change, leaders are often pulled between being optimistic and realistic, between being tough and empathetic, and between being self-reliant and trusting of others. These challenges are not easy to balance, no matter who the leader. But, the authentic, people-focused leaders understand the human side of change. According to Kerry Bunker and Michael Wakefield, authors of *Leading Through Transitions*, attributes of change-oriented leaders include the following.

1. **Catalyzing change** consistently promotes the cause, encourages others to get on board, and reinforces those who already are.
2. **Coping with transition** involves recognizing and addressing the personal and emotional elements of change. Leaders who are able to cope with transition are in touch with their personal reactions to change and transition and make use of that emotional information. They lead by example.
3. **Sense of urgency** involves taking action quickly when necessary to keep things rolling. Leaders who have a strong sense of urgency move fast on issues and accelerate the pace for everyone. They value action and know how to get things done.
4. **Realistic patience** involves knowing when and how to slow the pace to allow time and space for people to cope and adapt. Leaders who display realistic patience appreciate the fact that people learn and deal with change differently and do not judge them based on their own styles, preferences, or capabilities.
5. **Being tough** denotes the ability to make difficult decisions about issues and people with little hesitation or second-guessing. Leaders who are comfortable and secure with themselves can

# 5.12 | solutions

Making learning unforgettable.

display toughness; they're not afraid to take a stand in the face of public opinion or strong resistance.

6. **Being empathetic** requires taking others' perspectives into account when making decisions and taking action. Empathetic leaders try to put themselves in other people's shoes; they're able to enhance their own perspectives by considering the views of others.
7. **Optimism** is the ability to see the positive potential of any challenge. Leaders who exude optimism can communicate and convey that optimism to others.

Bunker and Wakefield go on to say that each of these capabilities is important. At the same time there are inherent conflicts between and paradoxes among them. That's the nature of change.

And as we move through these challenging times, people look for leaders who are optimistic yet realistic, strong yet vulnerable, demanding yet fair, and tough yet compassionate.

Are you an authentic, people-focused leader?

*Sal Silvester, President and Founder of 5.12 Solutions (five-twelve), works with teams who want to enhance how they communicate and collaborate, and with organizations who want to bring out the best in their people. Sal has a unique perspective on team and leadership development gained through his experience over the past 16 years as an Army Officer, an executive at Accenture, and founder of 5.12 Solutions. He has led teams in the desert of Kuwait, the mountains of Turkey, and in the offices of many clients. He is a graduate of the US Army Ranger and Airborne schools. He is an avid rock climber and mountaineer and has competed in 5 marathons and an Ironman triathlon. Sal integrates a unique blend of experiential activities, content, elearning, and DiSC and team assessments within his programs as tools for growth that make learning unforgettable.*