

CREATING EXTRAORDINARY ORGANIZATIONS

**Volume 3, Letter 8
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Prerequisite Characteristics of Individual Members – Part 2

I write this letter for those pioneers who want to move beyond the ordinary to the Extraordinary in creating business organizations.

Welcome to Letter 3-8 of Creating Extraordinary Organizations. In the last letter I started looking at issues one must deal with to create an EO. The first of these is assuring that each member has certain personal characteristics. I described six of them. In this letter I am going to talk about some ways organization members can design together that will help individual members develop them.

Necessary characteristics

The six characteristics I described in Letter 7 are:

1. A high level of self-knowledge
2. A high level of self-respect
3. The ability to be autonomous
4. The ability to work closely with others
5. The ability to seek, accept and handle responsibility
6. A high level of capability in one or more of the functions the organization needs.

The question is how we as a membership provide an environment in which each individual can work on all six of these. Remember that we are essentially experimenting here because to my knowledge no one has attempted to do this in the business world. Because of this, the ideas I present are only possibilities. I give them not as a prescription but as a way to stimulate thinking. I hope this will especially lead to thinking from the point of view of a member of an organization working to answer this question.

Developing characteristics

I believe the overall approach has two parts. The first is designing programs or processes a person can use to work on a characteristic. The second is building a culture that provides the right environment as well as organization-wide processes that support the individual's efforts. In some cases, things you do for one characteristic also help with another.

Self-knowledge

One possible process is making available various personality tests such as the MMPI that a person could take. However, you must also provide competent help to analyze them. Personal therapy is a route to knowing yourself better. You could use groups like T Groups that you design for personal learning rather than team building. It would be best if you set these methods up to take place within the organization.

As an essential part of the culture, the whole organization must fully support self-development. Everyone must view tests or going to therapy as means for development, not signs of personal problems. The ability to talk about personal not just business issues will support this. People have to be able to both give and receive honest but supportive feedback so that they can learn about themselves with and through others.

Self-respect

The first step toward self-respect is self-knowledge. Beyond that it can come through accomplishing challenging tasks. Therefore, a program that provides opportunities for people to ask for and receive such tasks would be useful.

Making and meeting commitments is another step toward self-respect. You can design a process that would enable the individual to know when he has or has not met a commitment. Various processes around setting and meeting goals would help. You do not use this method as a means for performance evaluation. Rather, you use it to let a person know whether he has accomplished what he set out to do.

Autonomy

Of course, having no hierarchy is a good starting point for becoming autonomous. If no one tells you what to do, you have to start acting on your own. A person also has to take responsibility for those actions. To support this, you could set up some sort of program that increased her awareness of the consequences of her actions. Any organization will need to set certain boundaries for all and enforce them. Setting and enforcing these boundaries helps a person know when she is not acting on her own or is harming someone when she is. Without knowing the effects of her actions, she cannot become effectively autonomous.

To promote developing autonomy, the organization as a whole must adhere firmly to one very important precept. You must never do for another what she can do for herself. If someone is constantly stepping in to “help” her, she will never learn she can do it on her own.

Work with others

The T-groups mentioned earlier can help not only the individual in self-development it can also help him to learn how to work with others. If I know how I affect others and they affect me, I will have information that will help me work with them. Of course, one of the best ways to learn to work with others is practice. Therefore, enabling acting in teams will help. However, for this to work well there must be the open communications and feedback I keep advocating.

Responsibility

The task program I suggested could help to foster this. A culture in which people value seeking responsibility is necessary. This includes strong support for making mistakes and learning from them. This in turn includes making it ok to ask for help when you really need it.

A very important factor in building responsibility is having someone depend on you. There is no greater sense of responsibility than when you have made a commitment to someone and know she is counting on and needs you. Of course, this means that people have to have enough self-knowledge and self-respect to be able and willing to depend on someone else. Meeting commitments must be an organizational imperative if people are to become responsible. You might support this with some method for recording an individual’s commitments as well as whether he met them.

Capability

This is not an area unique to building EO’s. However, in an EO it takes a different approach. In this culture, you enable and require self-directed learning rather than “training” people. Processes that support learning include ways for someone to assess his level of capability alone or with feedback from others. Another thing that will help him is to provide ways for him to know what capabilities he needs to be able to do what he wants. In order for someone to succeed at any of these, he needs to know what resources are available for learning and how to access them.

Conclusion

These are not detailed designs for how to build these characteristics. You will have to design ways that fit your particular environment. However, I believe approaches like the ones I have discussed are necessary to help individuals develop into effective organization members.

Two essential points are of paramount importance. First, together you are designing these methods for yourselves. You are not designing what you think someone else needs to improve. Second, self-development is an individual's own responsibility. No one has responsibility for another, and no one provides "help" unless asked.

Until next time

In the next letter I will take up an issue almost as important as developing individuals. This is the need for those now in command and control to let it go. I say "almost as important" because for this to work all others must be able to do without command and control. Only developed individuals can do this and go on to create an Extraordinary Organization.

Be Well, and
Be Extraordinary!

Don Yates
Extraordinary Organizations

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