

CREATING EXTRAORDINARY ORGANIZATIONS

Volume 3, Letter 9
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Letting Go of Control

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

Welcome to Letter 3-9 of Creating Extraordinary Organizations. In the last letter, I finished looking at the first issue we have to deal with to create an EO. This was assuring that organization members have the requisite characteristics for functioning in an EO. In this letter, I turn to the issue of those currently in power giving it up. This issue is second to the first in only one respect. In order to give up control you must first have members who can function without it.

This is a belief issue

It is easy to see why this is an issue we must address. In accordance with the second Core Belief, you have a non-hierarchical organization. Obviously, to do this requires that all those at upper levels of the hierarchy let go of their control. This in turn requires they change their belief in hierarchy and control to the Core Belief: *An organization has no hierarchy of authority. Authority comes only from the people who will be subject to it.*

Therefore, dealing with this issue takes us back to the fundamental one of changing beliefs. Letter 3-5 examined this. That letter did not give any specific answers as to how to get a person to change beliefs. However, it did give some ideas you must keep in mind when considering trying to get others to do so:

- We can propose new beliefs, but we cannot force them on others.
- We cannot change another's beliefs.
- A person can only change beliefs when she is aware of them.
- A person will change beliefs only if he sees the new ones as serving him better.
- A person has to believe she has the freedom and ability to change.
- You cannot produce change by attacking the old belief.

From these ideas you can conclude you have no control over a person changing his beliefs. To have any hope of his doing so, you must follow a pull not a push model. That is you cannot try to push the old belief out. You need to work on having the new belief draw the person in thus replacing the old one.

Resistance to change

There will be great resistance to changing to the new belief. First, those at the top of the hierarchy like being there. They get more money, more status, more perquisites, and other benefits up there. Hard to show someone how giving all those up will be a big benefit.

It is hard to overcome the common human trait of believing that I know what to do better than others. It is also fun and personally rewarding to make decisions. Even if I admit that I might not know everything, I am afraid to let others take responsibility for fear they will fail. Letting go of control can be very scary. We just somehow feel safer if we are doing the driving.

There is great support from almost everyone for there being someone at the top. I cannot count the number of times people have told me that there just has to be someone in charge or leading [As I discussed in Eletters 2-7 and 2-8, I see leading as a hierarchical position]. They will also say that people do not want responsibility and want someone to tell them what to do. [I am not sure why they are not like those “people.” How do they decide who fits in the “people” category? (“Employees” and “associates” always do.)] Anyone up the hierarchy can use these arguments and find no one who will disagree.

Those above you will either discourage you from doing this or just not let you do it. Can you imagine how scary it is if someone below you gives up some or all of her control? You are sure things will get out of hand. But what if they do not and giving up control works? Others might question your continuing to control. You are not going to risk that!

Even those below you will keep pressure on you to stay in command. To the extent that they believe the previous points they expect to live by them. One of my clients at the top of a pyramid started passing responsibility down the line. For instance, he had been acting as go between in squabbles between department heads. He stopped doing this as well as other control behaviors. Those below started accusing him of not doing his job.

For many it is easier and safer to let someone above take responsibility. Some have had so little chance to take responsibility they are afraid of it. This is why the last two letters dealt with building people capable of wanting and handling responsibility.

Who are prospects?

There are two aspects to this. The first is the individuals who are prospects. The second is the type of organization most likely to accept and implement this change. Starting with individuals, the answer is simple. The most likely candidate is someone who already believes in no hierarchy. Another possibility is a person who has serious doubts about control and will see the proposed belief as one she is ready to embrace.

In what type of organization will members accept this way? Right off the bat we can eliminate large companies with a big hierarchical pyramid. For any of the reasons discussed in the last section, no one up there is going to give up his spot.

Nor will we have much chance with those at the top of sub units of the large enterprise. First, they will most likely have much the same feeling as those at the very top. Second, no one above them is going to let them do it.

I think two situations have the best possibility. The first is a startup enterprise where the founder(s) have free reign to set the path of the organization. The second is in smaller companies where the current person in control has no one above. The startup is more likely because you are starting fresh without

anything in place to impede you. Changing from a current operation is much more difficult. There are already beliefs and methods in place. You have to unlearn them before you can learn new ones.

How do we find prospects?

I think there is only one answer to this. We do not. They have to find us. That means we have to find a way to let people know there are other ways to build an organization than what they are seeing now. We have to let them know they are not alone in questioning the status quo. We also need to let them know there are those who have ideas about how to build an EO and are willing to help them make it happen.

The best way to demonstrate the possibilities for creating an EO is to refer to current EO's. Unfortunately, I know only one of these—the Sudbury Valley School I talked about in letter 2-15. Some organizations have instituted less control in some areas. However, they have not demonstrated giving up more than partial control and do not show that no control works.

Another way is to put up lighthouses that those who are ready and looking can see. That is a major reason I write this eletter. Books and other forms of media will also help to get out the word. So far, none of these seems to have worked. Maybe they have not yet reached the right people. It will take courageous pioneers who are willing to go first in exploring new territory.

Conclusion

If what I have said leaves you wondering if I know exactly how to deal with this issue, the answer is no. I believe we can have organizations without command and control. I believe it is possible to help someone create them. However, I think we will only learn how to do this from experience. The new paradigm formed by the Core Beliefs is still a hypothesis that requires testing. We need some of those now in control to be willing to venture across the frontier and let us go with them as a guide. Together we can explore and find the right trail into rich new territory.

Until next time

If there is no hierarchy, we have to find ways to perform activities traditionally handled by those “above.” One of the most important of these is making decisions. Today the answer is simply someone higher than we are. But in an EO we have to have a way to decide who decides. I will look at that in the next letter unless.

Unless I report on a visit I am going to make at the end of this month to the Sudbury Valley School. I have long wanted to do this and at last am getting the chance. If it goes as I hope, I will have plenty to talk about, and that will preempt decision-making. So I do not even know what next time will be. Guess we will find out then.

Be Well, and
Be Extraordinary!

Don Yates
Extraordinary Organizations

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Control – To exercise authoritative or dominating influence over; direct

Manipulate – To influence or manage shrewdly or deviously

Dominates – To control, govern, or rule by superior authority or power: