INSIGHTS FROM RLF

Two RLF Books You Can Use Right Now for Everyday Leadership Challenges

SIM’s Regional Leadership Forum (RLF) provides a powerful learning experience through its highly-motivational curriculum that includes reading and discussing books and other media; learning from the stories of visiting business executives; and enhancing self-awareness, team-building, creative thinking, communication, business ethics and the global environment.

The reading for which RLF is justly famous covers a wide range of leadership ideas and lessons presented in more than 30 fiction and non-fiction books and other media. Most are designed to present key concepts, provide valuable insights, and promote critical thinking and robust discussion. Some are included to enhance vital leadership skills that are needed on a day-to-day basis – to expand the leadership toolkit needed to succeed in a world of ever-accelerating change. Two such very accessible and highly-practical books that garner rave reviews from participants year after year are Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High (by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler) and Managing Transitions (by William Bridges).

A crucial conversation is any conversation where the stakes are high, emotions run strong, and opinions vary – situations leaders face multiple times each day having to negotiate with business partners, address employee performance issues, communicate the latest organizational change, or kick off a critical initiative. Successful leaders master, rather than fear, crucial conversations, allowing them to kick-start a career, strengthen relationships, and even improve health.

Patterson et. al. use 25 years of research to provide specific principles and skills and a clear, step-by-step process to help master crucial conversations by identifying crucial conversation situations; understanding communication styles under stress; and “reading” the flow of a crucial conversation to identify issues, disagreements, emotions, and problems that need to be addressed. The result is a path toward mutual respect, toned down emotions, a climate for understanding, and most important of all: action and the desired results. The book concludes with guidance for making the skills second nature, advice for the toughest communication cases, and principles for turning ideas into actions to reap maximum benefit.

Change is perhaps the only constant in today’s business environment and the need to “manage change” is ubiquitous. Every day, newspapers report more corporate mergers and restructuring and every day thousands of lives are altered by these changes. Change is necessary to revitalize and improve corporate performance, but it is people who have to carry out the change and that is extremely difficult when they are being impacted. Effective leaders must understand how people are viewing and coping with the change, the impacts of the changes on those people, and what can be done to keep impacts from disrupting the entire organization.
Bridges provides a clear understanding, based on what is going on emotionally “inside” employees, of what change does to employees and what employees in transition can do to an organization. He shows how to minimize the distress and disruptions caused by change, presenting what should be done along with practical ways to bring people “on board.” He presents a simple three-phase transition model that eliminates much of the mystery surrounding the human side of change, as well as a series of checklists that serve as a road map for managing transitions in the real world.

These two core books of the RLF curriculum can help leaders look at crucial conversations and transitions as opportunities for the organization rather than fear them as stressful or hopeless situations.