



Taking Your Team Through The Valley of Despair

Emerging from a major change is difficult for everyone involved. For example, as we return to the comforting routine of our daily lives following the tragic and disturbing events of the past few months, we continue to experience new and sometimes frightening feelings. At the same time, however, you may sense that some of the original nervousness and caution we all felt just a few weeks ago is beginning to diminish. I know that is true for me, and I hope it this is true for you as well. That is how it feels to begin the journey out of the Valley of Despair. This is to be expected when managing change.

As I've written previously, we typically find ourselves in this valley when a change occurs or we lose something dear to us, such as a loved one, a job, our health or our sense of purpose. Of course the people in your organization are also journeying out. You will see them emerge at different stages of recovery, and many may continue to lack the focus and conviction they once had. Your team members will look to you, their leader, to help them restore their sense of purpose and cohesiveness. If you are to develop your organization and reach new and more effective levels of performance, you must make the effort to keep your organization synchronized as a team.

How am I to do this, you ask? The answer—and this is of paramount importance—lies not only in the ways your organization leads itself out of the Valley of Despair, but also ***in the ways you discover to lead yourself out***. From this point on, focus on new goals beyond the Valley of Despair. This is the time to realize that these traumatic, life-changing events can sharpen our skills as leaders—if we decide to learn from them.

Your goal during such a transition is more than merely surviving difficult times. It is finding marked improvement in team performance. Here are six valuable initiatives for you and your leadership team for generating a new level of synchronization:

1. Start by deciding that you are going to emerge from the Valley of Despair into a much better place. Make the *conscious decision* to raise the performance bar. Find someone you can trust and to whom you feel accountable and share with him or her how you are journeying through the Valley, what you are discovering about yourself and what the Mountains of Hope on the other side of the Valley are like. Take the time to enjoy sharing the unlimited possibilities that are open to you. If you are actively developing yourself towards new goals, you will be more able to work with your team members to reach new group-performance goals.
2. Capture the sense of coming through the Valley with your team by having an explicit discussion about renewing commitments to the future of your

organization. Dig out that old mission statement or credo you prepared and presented months ago and read it again—together. Clarify in your own mind your and your organization's purpose and start talking about it. Share your perspective of the Valley as well as the new goals for yourself and your organization's future. Start to help those still within the Valley who are not yet ready to face their own fuzziness. For the next few months, return to these explicit discussions of commitment each time you meet your team, and use them to gauge how the group is journeying. Remember that, like a mighty oak, commitment must grow steadily to become sturdy.

3. Working as a group, revisit your strategy and begin setting short-term goals with an effective horizon no more than three to six months away. Dig into the details by determining expected outcomes, specific tasks and methods of accountability. Push towards your "stretch" goals only to the extent you maintain the group's commitment to them.
4. Express the short-term game plan in an easy-to-understand way throughout your organization. Use this as a vehicle to communicate your commitment at team meetings, and use it frequently.
5. Stay synchronized. There are three critical elements to this: meeting together on a regular basis, be it office meetings or social gatherings; requiring that team members fulfill their commitments to delivering results and adhering to the game plan, and finally, using your regular discussions to raise and sort through negative emotions that could take over if left unchecked. Knowing what works for your individual leadership style is essential to staying aligned. Make sure you lead every review of progress so that you can give maximize positive reinforcement.
6. For the coming months, stay personally involved in the day-to-day activity of the business. Be visible, and lead by example. The closer you get to your customers, the more nourishment you will derive from seeing that your purpose is being achieved. As you become more involved, you will see your team's commitment building, and you can begin to raise everyone's sights.

Will your team emerge from the Valley of Despair and start the journey through the fuzziness towards new Mountains of Hope? Of course it will. Will things be better or worse for you there? That's up to YOU! The choice is YOURS. The time is NOW!

Stay in balance, and keep going.

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