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How to Be an Effective Leader in Times of Change

BRITISH WORKERS WHO ARE ENGAGED

11%

GALLUP

Businesses in the UK are grappling with uncertainty on a number of fronts. Recent economic headwinds -- including low productivity growth and an intensifying competition for talent -- are creating headaches for the country's business leaders. Rapid changes from digital advances, market globalization and the changing expectations of employees are complicating strategic decision-making. As discussed in Gallup's recent report on the [State of the Global Workplace](#), just 11% of British employees are psychologically engaged in their work. On top of all this, the country's pending departure from the European Union has cast a shadow over long-term investment and recruiting decisions for many companies.

A big part of the leadership challenge associated with a high-profile change like Brexit is managing anxiety among employees. It's a task that requires a clear focus on four basic needs identified by Gallup's leadership research, including a study of 10,000 followers who were asked to describe what the most positive leader in their daily lives contributes to their lives. Those four needs are trust, compassion, stability and hope.

Trust

Trust is the most foundational aspect of any relationship between a leader and his or her followers. In healthy relationships, it's simply taken for granted; Gallup's research with employee teams finds that the most successful ones rarely talk about trust. For struggling teams, on the other hand, it's a common topic of discussion as team members vent their frustrations and share information to compensate for the lack of reliable communication from leaders.

Leaders who lack credibility give followers little reason to take them seriously. An event like Brexit gives leaders an opportunity to have honest, forthright conversations about its potential impact. It's less important that leaders have all the answers than that they openly share what information they *do* have. Such conversations build trust and help team members share their own challenges and concerns, giving managers the chance to address and, in many cases, dispel them.

Compassion

Trust is reinforced by employees' conviction that leaders have their best interests at heart. The frankness of leaders' honest conversations about an event like Brexit is leavened by employees' sense that leaders will take the well-being of all employees into account in planning for its possible ramifications. Gallup's research with followers finds that they expect high-level organizational leaders to model kindness and have general positive energy, while they use more intimate words like "caring" to describe the forms of compassion they expect from their everyday leaders.

Stability

A sense of stability about the fundamental values of the organization provides a bulwark against possible volatility caused by an event like Brexit. Employees know that, though they may not be able to anticipate changes in the environment, they can count on their expectations of how the organization will respond to such changes.

As with trust, transparency is key to stability. Managers who have frequent contact with employees, communicating key organizational metrics and helping team members see how they contribute to those metrics, help maintain a sense of stability even in uncertain times.

Hope

Gallup's leadership research makes an important distinction between *initiating* and *responding*. While many leaders say they spend much of their time responding to day-to-day problems, those who most effectively generate hope and optimism also spend time initiating long-term plans for development and growth.

The result is that such leaders not only personally inspire their followers with a positive vision for their future, they also proactively build an organizational culture that fuels that sense of progress. Managers should maintain that future orientation in their interactions with employees, with a particular focus on continual development opportunities. The resulting mindset helps employees take change -- even potentially disruptive events like Brexit -- more in their stride. Change is more readily seen as part of the day-to-day life of the organization, positive in the sense that it brings opportunities as well as challenges.

During any time of uncertainty, resistance is a natural reaction. Leaders don't vanish during these moments. If anything, the best leaders spend even more time with their teams, creating a positive response to these four simple statements:

- My supervisor is an active supporter of the changes that affect our workgroup.
- There is open communication throughout all levels of the organization.
- I am asked for my input regarding changes that affect my work.
- Leaders in my organization help me see how changes made today will affect my organization's future

How would your team respond to these questions if you asked them today?
Managers who model these attributes will find it very natural to have open, positive conversations with team members -- conversations that help them think creatively

about the opportunities generated by possible changes, rather than fear of the consequences.

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