

# ENGAGING THE SURVIVORS

---

## ENERGIZING YOUR WORKFORCE AFTER DOWNSIZING







vulnerable; you **do** need their help. People are intrinsically motivated to help others. According to a recent study, the human brain is hard-wired to help others, with actions of support stimulating activity in the reward and stress-reducing centers of the brain.<sup>2</sup> Leverage this! Let employees **choose** to help you, and simultaneously feel good about themselves and reduce stress. It's a win-win proposition.

Next, create an environment in which employees are empowered to make that choice. Let go of the details, and put them in the hands of your employees. The downsizing activities have destroyed the natural working teams in the company. Processes will have to be reworked to adapt to the new organization. You should set the vision and accountability, but let your employees define the new work processes. Give them the latitude to figure out how to make things work in the new organization. Make the go-forward plan their **choice**. If they create it, they will own it. They will be invested in it, and will **choose** to make it successful.

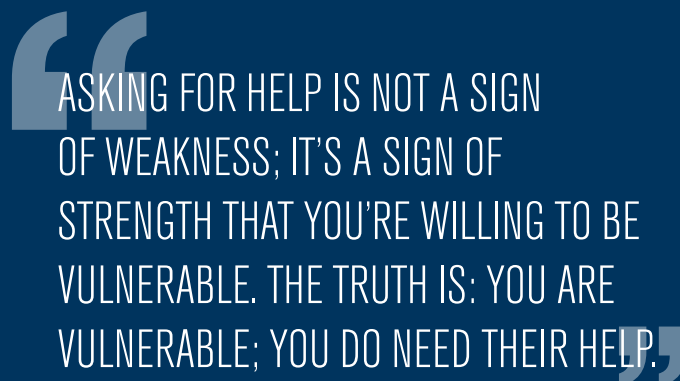
Finally, create clear, safe alternatives for employees to **choose**. When you give employees the opportunity to **choose** to opt in, you must also give them the opportunity to **choose** to opt out. You may have employees who simply will not get on board with the new organization. It is far better to manage this in a proactive manner than let it fester under the surface. A disgruntled employee can impose significant damage in this tense environment. If an employee chooses to leave, support his/her decision as you support those who choose to stay. That employee will work harder during the transition knowing that s/he has your support, and is less likely to poison the rest of your workforce. Don't take it personally — this is business. Moreover, given this level of support, employees often change their minds and **choose** to stay.

## CONDUCT A THOUGHTFUL SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Chances are good that you're asking employees to take on new and different tasks in the new organization. At a high level, you considered this during the downsizing exercise. You believe they are capable of the new roles and responsibilities. Now it's time to put this belief into practice.

Ask employees to define the skills required in the new roles and self-assess their levels of competence in those skills. Timing is important. Employees should be given the opportunity to define the new work processes and truly understand what they need to accomplish in the new roles. Make it abundantly clear that this activity will not impact performance appraisals. This candid conversation will help set employees up for success.

One-on-one, review the self-assessments with employees and provide your own feedback. More often than not, employees underestimate their capabilities. When skills gaps arise, work collaboratively to establish action plans. Your funding is limited, so think outside of the box. Is this a skill you could transfer to your employee? Are there others in the company who could mentor your employee? Is there training available through your corporate learning and development organization? Finally, is external training available to give your employee the skills necessary to succeed? It is essential that employees know that the company is supporting them in these new roles and is committed to ensuring success. Do not skimp on training to save costs, only to have committed employees fail in their new roles.



“ASKING FOR HELP IS NOT A SIGN OF WEAKNESS; IT'S A SIGN OF STRENGTH THAT YOU'RE WILLING TO BE VULNERABLE. THE TRUTH IS: YOU ARE VULNERABLE; YOU DO NEED THEIR HELP.”

## MAKE SUCCESS ATTAINABLE

Your organization has gotten smaller, but the workload is at least the same and possibly larger. While you clearly were hoping to recognize efficiencies through this process, it's your job as leader to ensure that employees are able to succeed in the new organization. The workloads in the new environment must be realistic. You made assumptions during the downsizing process as to the **amount** of work your teams could accomplish. It was your best guess. You have to make sure the assumptions were accurate.

In project management, the “triple constraint” is well known. For a given level of quality, there are three competing levers that must be managed: cost, scope and time.<sup>3</sup> If one changes significantly, the others must be adjusted to compensate. The same holds true for your new organization. You have significantly reduced cost in your company. To continue producing high quality work, you may need to adjust scope or time. Changes in scope could include stopping lower value activities or shifting work to other parts

of the organization. Timelines might also have to be adjusted. Carefully monitor the workloads of your employees and actively manage these tradeoffs when issues arise.

In his book *Accelerate: Building Strategic Agility for a Faster-Moving World*, change management guru John Kotter enhanced his seminal work, *Eight Steps for Leading Change*, to advise leaders to “enable action by removing barriers: remove obstacles to change, change systems or structures that pose threats to the achievement of the vision”.<sup>4</sup> This is essential to the success of your new organization. Search for and remove inefficient processes and hierarchies. Dr. Kotter also reported that 44% of leaders agree that their own management strategies are too bureaucratic and are a nuisance.<sup>5</sup> In your new reality, you can't afford bureaucracy. Challenge your old way of managing and actively look for opportunities to make your employees' jobs easier. Step out of rigid processes and find creative ways to be more agile. Do people need flexible schedules or remote working opportunities? Make it happen. Now is not the time to rely on “the way we've always done it.”

## CELEBRATE SUCCESSES, EVEN SMALL ONES

You and your employees have endured a lot of difficult change and stress. Seek every opportunity to celebrate small wins. Start with the basics, such as birthdays or work anniversaries. Look for ways to reinforce the successful changes your organization has made. Lock in those new, desired behaviors with intentional acknowledgment. You don't have the budget to host elaborate events, so consider low-cost celebrations that are personal and meaningful. A handwritten note from a senior executive, special mentoring opportunity, or team pot-luck can reinforce employee commitment, show appreciation and improve morale.

## CONCLUSION

Re-engaging employees after a downsizing is not easy, but it is within your span of control. You hold the keys to helping your employees transition through this difficult change and emerge as successful participants in the new organization. Your thoughtful planning and deliberate actions will make the difference in creating an energized, committed workforce.

---

<sup>1</sup> Prosci Incorporated, *Best Practices in Change Management*, Prosci Research Report, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Tristen Inagaki, Ph.D. and Naomi Eisenberger, Ph.D., “The Neurobiology of Giving Versus Receiving Support: The Role of Stress-Related and Social Reward-Related Neural Activity,” *Psychosomatic Medicine: Journal of Biobehavioral Medicine*, February 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Pamela McGhee and Peter McAlaney, *Painless Project Management: A Step-by-Step Guide for Planning, Executing, and Managing Projects*, Wiley, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> John Kotter, PhD, *Accelerate: Building Strategic Agility for a Faster-Moving World*, Harvard Business Review Press, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> John Kotter, PhD, *Eight Steps to Accelerate Change* in 2015, retrieved from <http://www.kotterinternational.com/ebook/Kotter-8-steps-ebook.pdf>, 2015.

### About the Author:

Wendy Hallmark is a Senior Director in Alvarez & Marsal's Houston office and a leader in the firm's organizational change management practice. With over 20 years of experience in consulting and industry, Ms. Hallmark helps clients improve performance by leading transformational change initiatives and coaching executives on how to successfully lead in periods of complex change.

When action matters, find us at:  
[www.alvarezandmarsal.com](http://www.alvarezandmarsal.com)

Follow us on:



© Copyright 2016 Alvarez & Marsal Holdings, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

### ABOUT ALVAREZ & MARSAL

Companies, investors and government entities around the world turn to Alvarez & Marsal (A&M) when conventional approaches are not enough to activate change and achieve results.

Privately-held since 1983, A&M is a leading global professional services firm that delivers performance improvement, turnaround management and business advisory services to organizations seeking to transform operations, catapult growth and accelerate results through decisive action. Our senior professionals are experienced operators, world-class consultants and industry veterans who draw upon the firm's restructuring heritage to help leaders turn change into a strategic business asset, manage risk and unlock value at every stage.

# ALVAREZ & MARSAL