

moan about you, individuals carry on doing things in the old way, they join in only if they have to and you even end up losing your best people as they leave the organisation.

So how can a leader see their people in organisations?

See what I think...

If you're thinking of changing things, it makes sense to get ideas from others as to what their opinions are. This also serves to socialise your proposed change in the early stages of its conception and makes people feel that they have been involved from the outset.

- Be visible and wander around the organisation yourself, asking people about the change needed
- Organise focus groups, representative of the organisational profile, to discuss the issues involved
- Facilitate a questionnaire that all employees can respond to regarding the change needed and make sure that their participation is acknowledged and the results fed back to them

Let me see what you mean...

You can never communicate enough during periods of change. When people aren't kept up to date with how things are, then they fill the silence with erroneous and often demoralising rumours. Even at a hierarchical distance you can still make your people feel you are seeing them. Make sure you:

- Say things again and again. And again. The more the news is bad news, the less likely we are to take it on board the first time
- Say when you have nothing to report and promise to report when you do. We want to know you are still on the case for us, even in the silence
- Correct inaccuracies quickly, they can make us unnecessarily fearful
- Acknowledge problems, worries and concerns immediately. You not talking about them won't make them go away and you can be sure that everyone else is talking about them. Incessantly.
- Use your internal networks to broadcast your message – newsletters, podcasts, blog – let people know you are there and listening to them
- Organise munch and moan lunches. Okay, I'm joking about the moaning bit but there is a lot to be said for getting people to let off steam in an environment where you can influence the response to the concerns and queries that arise
- Graffiti the walls with your messages, demonstrating your understanding of what people are thinking and feeling. I loved the story of the railway worker who chalks up a personal positive message to all travellers every morning on Bakerloo Station information board. Messages such as 'You've given work enough for the day, the rest of it is yours for the evening'. There's someone who knows how to reach us all. As he says, life can be a lonely place.

See how you can include me...

To see people you have to place yourself in the space of being able to hear and observe them. If it's not always possible to go to them then bring them to you.

- Encourage people to join in change projects, to take control and responsibility
- Know what individual's strengths are and encourage them to use them
- Catch people doing things right and celebrate them
- If people aren't performing then implement consequences. There is nothing more demoralising than working your socks off but never being recognised for doing so and the person alongside is neither pulling their weight or even up to scratch

See me...

Nothing can take the place of a personal conversation with someone. Although even that has its success criteria. Talking to people takes time, precious time, so it's worth doing it well.

- What you are saying maybe well intended but you need to watch the impact on the person you are talking to. As Jack Welch famously commented, 'I don't know what I've said until I've heard the answer'
- Listen for underlying and unspoken emotions, not just to the content of what people are saying. Acknowledge these emotions openly
- Practise a relaxed stillness in your body language. Pay attention with your eyes not just your ears. Be present in your mind to what they are saying. You're not about to rush off, you've decided to be there for that person so get the most out of it by investing effort in making the person feel 'seen'
- Put away the gadgets, they're a monumental distraction
- Talk about things that are important to the other person and keep your promises if you offer to do something

Finally, see people unexpectedly

This is always a difficult one. During times of change there is often a lot of angry language about unfulfilled expectations of what 'they' should be doing and how 'they' should know better. 'They' being you, person in charge. People will tend to focus on how they are being ignored as opposed to what you are doing to see them right.

However, my own experience is that being seen has even greater power to motivate when it is unexpected. When I wrote my first article, I sent it off on pure speculation to an organisation that runs a monthly newsletter. To my complete amazement, they wanted to publish it. This recognition inspired me and motivated me to write more. It helped me find my voice. When I run training or development interventions, it's the unsolicited feedback that carries more weight and impact than the orchestrated 'happy sheet' at the end of a programme. Positive or negative!

I've majored on the positive aspects and impact of being seen. That seeing people positively has a synergistic impact; that negative ways of acknowledging people must be justified and appropriate to

their behaviours. And there are those who are just addicted to being seen. The 'naughty' ones in class, the people in the organisation or in your team who are constantly stirring it. Their unhelpful behaviour is born of a need to be acknowledged, even if it hurts. And there are those who just don't want to be seen.

It's also true that people can be cynical around positive acknowledgement. We can be well practiced at discounting compliments or affirmative attention, so it's important to underpin and reinforce that your acknowledgement is both genuine and authentic.

And finally, do we have a responsibility to ourselves to be seen? I could have ignored my hurt at the dismissal of my good turn. I knew if I raised the issue, it wouldn't go down well because I was placing that person in a bad light and it's only natural when people get defensive in that situation. But I took courage, talked about how I felt – and yes, did incur some wrath and petulance (!)...but after some reflection, my thoughts and feelings were acknowledged, accepted and recognised as being true and real to me. And in that moment I lost the anger, it didn't seem to matter so much anymore. I'd been seen. I let it go and moved on.