

The Transparent Organization: Getting “There” by Getting Clear

By Gary Winters

Leaders can create transformative experiences when they focus on creating transparent organizations (or teams). The primary characteristic of a Transparent Organization is clarity – *everyone knows* where are we going, how are we going to get there, and what each of us must do to maximize our (individual and collective) potential. Here are critical aspects of the Transparent Organization:

A crystal clear, easy-to-remember compelling mission and vision.

Stakeholders in a Transparent Organization have a clear and compelling picture of what it wants to create and what it wants to become. Everyone knows this as well as they know their own name. It's a source of energy, a rallying cry, a spirited description of the future.

A dual focus on achievement and fulfillment.

Transparent Organizations have a dual purpose – to achieve a ‘business’ result (often described in the Mission Statement) in a way which enables stakeholders to experience a deep sense of satisfaction and personal worth by doing so. One without the other will not prevail in the long run.

Passion.

Every stakeholder has a deep, personal commitment to the aims of the organization. Their personal values are consistent with the values of the organization.

Alignment

Every stakeholder has a “line-of-sight” to the vision of the whole organization. Each person understands exactly how his/her contribution and performance helps the organization achieve its goals.

Clear communication

In the Transparent Organization, clear, frequent, open communication is both a core value and a consistent practice. Where are we going? What are we doing? How are we doing? and What do we need to do? are frequent questions – and the answers are known to stakeholders.

Clear, optimistic yet realistic performance expectations

Stakeholders co-create goals and performance targets with their leader / mentor and receive feedback on their performance frequently.

A sense of ownership

Stakeholders in a Transparent Organization act as though they each “own” the organization, that it belongs to them. As such, they act as the owner of any enterprise would act, committing to its success, doing whatever it takes, etc.

Shared leadership

Every stakeholder in the organization is seen as a leader (someone who has the ability and the willingness to influence the direction to be taken)

Shared coaching

Everyone is a coach, and everyone gets coached. Coaching is not the exclusive province of managers and supervisors, but rather an expectation of everyone. Anyone can (and should, and will) coach anyone.

Shared responsibility

In a Transparent Organization, all stakeholders act as though each were 100% responsible for any given outcome. Responsibility isn't divided.

Shared decision making

When decisions are made, stakeholders are involved appropriately. Some decisions must be made by one person acting alone, and others should be made by consensus. In the Transparent Organization, the process by which particular decisions will be made is obvious and clear to all involved.

Initiative

Stakeholders don't have to wait to be told what to do, nor do they routinely ask what to do. At a minimum, if they are unsure of the next step, they recommend a course of action, while (for the most part) they act using their best judgment, providing informal updates or status reports to their leaders, teams, and partners as needed.

Risk taking

Stakeholders take mindful risks to further the aims of the organization. They look for ways to improve, expand, enhance, be more effective or efficient, etc. As leaders (everyone's a leader) they make a case for a new, different, or better way of doing things.

A tolerance (or even passion) for mistakes

The Transparent Organization is a learning organization, and sees mistakes as “coachable moments” and learning opportunities.

Empowering language

Gone are terms like *span of control*, *boss*, *subordinate*, *chain of command*, and so on. They are replaced by words like *sphere of influence*, *associate*, and *network*.

The Leader's task:

Transparent Organizations don't happen by accident. They are the product of skilled, committed leadership. Examine your own leadership practice in light of these ideas and see what you need to do.

To learn more, call 619-497-1937 or email garywinters@cox.net