



## TRANSCRIPT

### **Episode #46: Creating Team Resiliency During Transitions**

You are listening to episode 46 of *Mastering The Power Skills*. If I had to make a guess, at least 50% of you listening to this episode have recently gone through, are currently in, or are about to go through an organizational transition of some sort. It might be a new leader or a new change initiative. It might be a restructuring or a downsizing. It might be a merger of some kind.

Organizational transitions are now simply a recurring fact of our work lives. But that doesn't mean that they're now easy. It does mean that we as leaders can become a lot more knowledgeable about how to help others to navigate them. Join me in this episode to learn some new ideas about how we can positively shape the morale and the resiliency of our teams when transitions occur.

How much more could you accomplish if you were 25% or even 50% more influential and persuasive? Welcome to *Mastering The Power Skills*, the podcast that provides you with the tips, strategies, and the inspiration to grow your own power and win support for your ideas. And now here's your host, C-suite leadership coach Kathy Dockry.

Hi everyone. Well, I've been through a lot of organizational transitions during my corporate career, and as you can imagine, in my subsequent years as a leadership coach I've seen countless more. The good news from where I sit, we've learned so much about how to manage transitions well, both as individuals and as leaders who are actually expected to implement the transition with our teams.

One area in particular where companies have improved greatly is with respect to communications. Most management teams understand that communication needs to be clear and frequent, both with respect to things that are known and also with respect to what is not yet known. Management teams are also doing a much better job of identifying what constituencies need to be communicated with and what channels should be used to communicate.

However, if there's one area where we all can improve our game even more, it's in helping our teams manage all those complicated and stressful emotions that can

arise during a transition. And there appears to be two current thoughts of how to address this.

The first school of thought is to accentuate the positive, which generally means articulating the good outcomes that the transition will provide to the company, and to a lesser extent to the individuals within the company. Now, I think communicating the positive aspects of a transition is a very good and necessary thing to do because we all want to know whatever the challenges of a transition, it's well worth doing.

My only question is whether simply communicating the positive is sufficient. And as you'll see in just a minute, my feeling is that on its own, communicating the benefits overlooks an important dynamic.

So the other school of thought, the second school of thought about how to handle the emotional climate of a transition is to sympathize with the pain. Clearly, there can be stress and actual pain during a transition. People worry about the impact of decisions on them. And because there often is no immediate clarity on those decisions, the ambiguity and the potential risk can inflict an emotional toll on employees.

To offer sympathy seems like a very reassuring thing to do to calm people down and improve morale, right? But appearances can be deceiving. Most of the time that I've seen leaders sympathize with the pain, it backfires. It actually erodes morale and increases stress and tension. I've thought long and hard about why this is. And my conclusion is that we as employees, we look to our leaders to, well, to provide leadership and strength during tough times, to be role models that we can follow.

If they turn to us and offer us a hand to be held, well, that's nice, but then who is providing the strength and confidence that we need to emulate to navigate successfully during a difficult time?

So, if as leaders during a transition, we need to do more than just accentuate the positive, but we also need to dial down over-sympathizing, what should we be focusing on? And how do we do that? I've come to believe that the best leaders think of themselves as guides to their team during a transition, like a guide during a journey.

They tell their team something like this, we are collectively going on a journey together. Because of my prior experience, or because I'm part of the transition team itself, I may know a little bit more about how this transition is going to unfold than you do. And I'll do my best to point out some of the things you'll be

seeing and experiencing along the way. I'll also tell you what those things you'll be seeing and experiencing mean, so you don't have to spend too much time worrying about them.

I won't always have the answers, and I even might be surprised at some of the things we encounter along the way. But even then, you can count on me to do my best to be a good guide, and we'll figure out the best solutions together to get us successfully to our destination. So that might be an example of what you would say to your team if you were a guide.

And what I love about being a guide as a leader is that it acknowledges the obvious, that transitions aren't always easy or predictable. But it acknowledges it in a way that makes the team feel supported, resourceful, and resilient. When you do that, you are solving the morale problem because people who feel supported, resourceful, and resilient don't have morale problems. They just don't. Instead, they feel energized and capable, even though they understand that the road ahead might be tough.

So how do you actually act like a guide when you're leading your team during a transition? Well, most importantly, if you're going to be a guide, it helps to have a map, and here is the three-point map that I often give to leaders who I'm coaching.

So the first thing about this map is before you say anything, you put yourselves in the shoes of your intended audience. In other words, your team. You want to identify two things. What legitimately might dismay them about the transition itself? And what legitimately might dismay them about how you're showing up as a leader?

Now, a little side note here. Notice that I'm referring to legitimate dismay. What do I mean by that? Well, we've all seen team members who hate a transition because they oppose any change whatsoever. Or they oppose it because they have a grudge against the leader who is the architect of the transition.

Now, these are normal feelings, of course. People who feel that way are entitled to have their personal point of view. But what they're not entitled to is to individually sabotage a transition. If you can't tolerate the change, then the productive response is to consider whether you're a good fit for the changing environment and whether it's time to move on. An unproductive response, a dismay that's not legitimate, is going to cause you to be a hurdle to everybody who's trying to navigate the transition.

So what might be legitimate dismay? In other words, how might your team be feeling that's pretty normal and not intended to be unproductive? Well, here are

a few examples. Your team might be noticing that the leaders aren't fully present or focused or accessible, because this is often the case with senior leaders during a transition. They're juggling so much at once and drinking from a fire hose as they do. And if you're an employee, you might be wondering if this is going to be the new normal. In other words, are our leaders ever going to get back to being focused and present and accessible?

Here's another thing your team might be noticing. They might be noticing that there still aren't a lot of details about the organizational structure or the roles, or even sometimes a sense of direction. They're wondering if this is because decision makers are themselves confused and not knowing where they're going or whether it's for some other reason. They just don't know.

And your team might have a new leader who's asking a lot of questions. They're going to be wondering if this means if their leader is a micromanager or the leader is a hypercritical person or whether the leader even has a hidden agenda that they haven't figured out yet.

All of these are frequent things that employees see during a transition and legitimate conclusions that they might jump to when they see those things. And of course, there might be a host of other behaviors that employees are noticing as well.

So number one, going back to what I was saying, if you are leading a team, you want to first ask yourself, what is my team seeing that might provoke some concerns in their minds?

Now, once you've identified what might be dismaying your team, the second thing that you can do as a good guide and leader is normalize the experience that they are having. That means acknowledging that they are seeing certain things, but using your deeper understanding to explain to them how to interpret what they're seeing.

So here's an example of a conversation a leader recently had with their team as she normalized for them the things they were noticing and getting worried about. She said this. In a transition, a lot of things are getting addressed simultaneously versus sequentially. And that's entirely normal for a transition. It's not a sign that things are breaking down. It's simply what has to happen to get from point A to point B, where everything starts getting clearer and more structured.

And then she went on to say, for example, you might see this or this or this. These were all things that she had previously identified as possibly concerning to employees. And some of these things she said might last a while, but don't worry



about that too much. It's not the new normal, but just a phase. Things will settle down and we will be working through all of this together.

So interesting, right? That little speech might not have totally eliminated the natural stress and worry of a transition, but you can see why it substantially dialed down that worry, because the leader was pointing out to the team what was actually happening in the journey. She was acknowledging the reality of the situation, but she was also providing them with the context they needed not to overreact to what was happening.

The third thing that leaders can do to make their team feel more resilient during a transition is to equip them with a few tips and resources they can use during the process. And again, the analogy of a journey works well here. A good guide makes sure you have what you need to navigate the journey well.

Each transition is a different journey, so I can't give you a comprehensive list of what all those tips and resources should be, but here are a few examples of what that leader I was mentioning before told her team during this particular transition.

First, she explained to them that during a transition, it's not unusual that some of their work might need to be prioritized. In other words, they needed to be

sensitive that the focus should mainly be on mission-critical tasks. If there were any initiatives in which they were involved that could wait for several months without a downside, then they should be prepared for some delays. But then she reassured them that delayed projects should not by themselves be a cause for concern.

On the flip side, she recommended that the team speak up if something important appeared to be overlooked. During a transition it's not unusual for managers to be distracted. If something isn't getting addressed and needs prompt action, they shouldn't assume that the item was on the manager's radar screen and being intentionally ignored. Instead, a better approach was to step up and respectfully remind the manager as to why that item might need some focus now versus later.

This leader also reminded the team how important it was that they all support each other during a transition. In this case, she expected the transition to open up new and exciting possibilities, but that didn't mean that it wouldn't also be stressful. She encouraged the team to be attentive to the fact that their colleagues often might need a little more support and encouragement than usual during normal times. And she recommended that they avoid venting or dumping their emotions on others in a way that could demoralize them.

And finally, she repeated her commitment to clear and regular communication during the transition, and she asked that the managers on the team commit to that too. She clarified for everyone that this commitment didn't mean that they would have answers to every question, but it did mean that leaders would be actively collecting questions and also be sharing information in a timely way. When specific details were unknown, leaders also would be providing the team with a sense of the timeline for further information and actions.

She also specified the various channels that would be used for information, ranging from videos on the company intranet, small group meetings, larger town halls, that sort of thing, and she encouraged her team to take advantage of all those channels.

Now, all of these tips and resources aren't that unusual, right? But what was different in this case is this particular leader took the time to walk her team through these tips instead of assuming they already knew them. Why did she do that? It's because stress makes people forget what they already know.

A good guide to the journey reminds them of the resources and behaviors that will ease the way during the transition. And when the guide takes the time to do that, it dials down the emotional stress for the team. They feel more empowered and resilient and ready to undertake the journey ahead because a prepared team

is a team that can successfully navigate the uncertainty ahead in order to reap the benefits of the transition.

So, for all of you leaders out there who are guiding their own teams, take a little time to think about how to prepare them for the journey. It's not a big investment of time and it pays major dividends in terms of making the transition process less strainful and painful for you as well as for your team.

That's it for this episode, everyone, and I hope you have an awesome week ahead. I'll see you in our next episode.

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