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*Paying it Forward
Leading with Purpose
with Chief Randy R. Bruegman, (Ret)*

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When the Importance of the Bureaucracy Becomes More Important Than the Mission, You Have a Problem

I had the opportunity to work in local government for forty years, twenty-seven at the department head level. That experience provided a front row seat to understand the inadequacies of how bureaucratic organizations are not designed to quickly adapt to the changing external environment, their customer demands, and the needs and desires of the workforce. It was Max Weber (1864–1920), known as the father of modern sociology, who analyzed bureaucracy as the most logical and rational structure for large organizations, defined by hierarchical structures and clear rules, regulations, and lines of authority that govern it. Most organizations today are built upon that model, and the bigger and more complex the organization, often the more contained and regimented the workplace becomes. In a bureaucratic structure the overwhelming acceptance of authority is its central tenet.

This inevitably fosters an unrelenting need to develop additional authority, causing the bureaucracy often to become bloated and unresponsive, leading to lack effectiveness. Bureaucratic emphasis on the impersonal can lead to personal frustration for its employees while generating red tape to reinforce previously authorized decisions. As the demands of society become ever more complex, the need increases for interpersonal communication and sharing among employees within the organization. One has to look no farther than our federal government system, exemplifying a system, struggling to meet the demands of its customer base, mostly due to the embedded managerial systems that cannot react and adapt quickly enough to meet the changing demands of their customers, their employees, and the world in which they operate. If they did not have the ability to print money, and operate with an evergreen deficit, they would have been out of business many years ago. This is not to say that bureaucracy is bad, but it has to evolve and govern the people who work in it as little as possible, so it can achieve the mission. So often, the bureaucracy becomes the mission, and that is when the



effectiveness and efficiency of an organizations ceases to exist; its ability to meet its mission is lost. Large organizations like governments or larger businesses can fail to achieve efficiency because the layers of action required to get something done are so numerous that by the time a project is approved, the opportunity is lost. Other times, results are sacrificed-the results of ineffective legacy systems, underfunded departments, or not spending funding where it will produce the best outcomes. Instead, it is focused on perpetuating the bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is that force of internal inertia in most organizations that holds them back from change. Does any of this sound familiar where you are employed?

In any organization, large or small, there is always a need for structure, rules, roles,

and systems to coordinate the efforts of many toward a common mission. Bureaucracy, to be successful in today's ever changing environment, must evolve to become more of an enabling system that is focused on the collaboration and coordination, employee empowerment, engagement, and outcomes of organizational performance. As the speed of change accelerates in this century, organizational bureaucracies that do not adapt will become less effective, as many already are, resulting in the provision of poorer services, and the inability to attract talent for their workforce.

So, how do you begin to move our organizations built on these systems to become less focused on their own bureaucracies and more focused on the services or products they provide?

Build a Culture That is Customer Centric.

To move your organization from one that is mired and focused on their own processes, to one that is focused on providing best in class services and products, it starts with building a team to do that.. Yes, it will not be easy, and it will take time, but the right culture is a foundational element in doing just that. Here are some strategies to get you there.

- Hire people in all positions that have the aptitude and a passion to provide quality customer service. That is not everyone's skill set, so hire right.
- Ask your customers and employees what they want and expect from your organization.
- What criteria would your customers use to rate your performance?
- Make the customers experience every employee's priority.

- Emphasize customer centric values throughout your organization.
- Provide the necessary support and training to your employees and treat them well.
- Focus on continuing to improve your value proposition with your customers
- Find ways to measure you success and failures with your customers.

Implement A Continuous Improvement

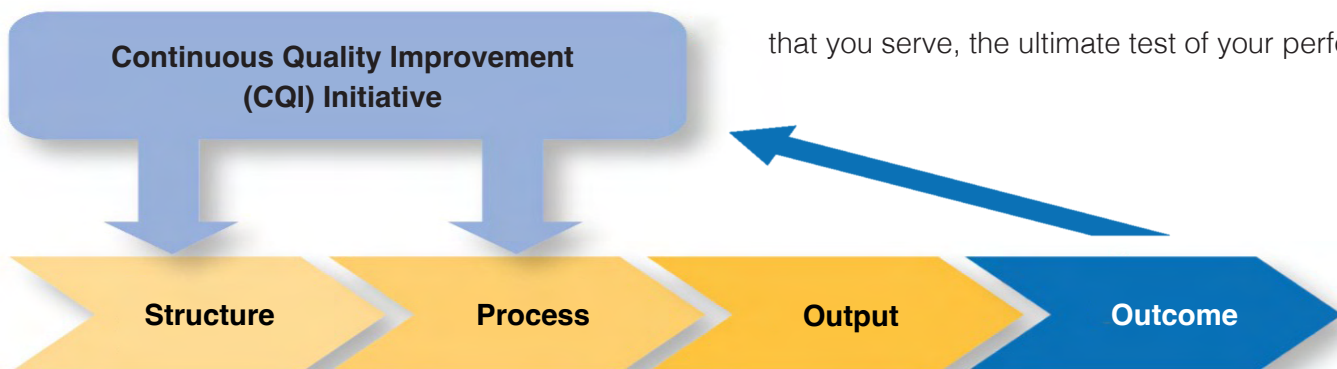
Model. One the best strategies that I have found to overcome the lethargy that is often the result of an enculturated bueacracy mindset is the implementation of quality improvement initiatives. Continuous quality improvement (CQI) is leadership philosophy that encourages all members of your team to continuously ask themselves "how are we doing and can we do it better," with an emphasis on internal and external customer satisfaction. A continuous quality improvement program aims to ensure that all team members, employees, managers, and other

stakeholders feel consistently empowered to improve organizational effectiveness with a focus on streamlining and improving performance in the following areas:

- **Structure:** Structure includes the hierarchy of the organization. How many levels do you have to migrate through to get something done? The structure includes all of the support mechanisms such as technological, human, physical, and financial assets that are available to carry out your work. If you could re-imagine your work structure to make it work more efficiently, what would that look like and what actions would need to be taken to make it happen?
- **Process.** The activities, workflows, or task(s) carried out to achieve an output or outcome are considered *process*. Your process activities are a great place to ask, “How is it working now, and

how can we do it better?” Small incremental improvements to your processes over time can make a significant difference in organizational performance.

- **Output:** What was accomplished as a result of the time and resources dedicated to a project or a service delivered. Continuous improvement is about continuous measurement. Effective organizations use performance measures to track their outputs toward the outcomes the organization is trying to achieve.
- **Outcomes:** Quantifies the improved performance resulting from the implementation of a product or service. If an organization is focused on their outcomes, they will be less likely to become mired in their own bureaucracies. While outcomes can be more challenging to verify, as they are both qualitative (data that is descriptive) and quantitative, (data that is numerical). Outcomes are the impacts that your organization is making on the customers that you serve, the ultimate test of your performance.



Think about how your own organization works in each of these areas, are there areas where improvement is needed. What I like about the CQI process, is it becomes embedded into your culture, and into your everyday operation. It is a continuous feedback loop to improvement. While it does not provide a quick fix for most issues, it does provide a methodic and systematic effort that, over time, will make any organization better, helping to create a much more agile bureaucracy.

Focus on Organizational Performance

Outcomes. It is not uncommon for bureaucratic organizations to measure their performance based upon outputs, those activities or actions taken toward achieving a goal. Common in government and business, a problem or specific need to be addressed. Do you author a report to develop a plan? One thing is for sure, authoring a report for developing a plan is not a measurable outcome, it is an output toward addressing an issue or articulating how to achieve your organization goals. Outcomes are the measurable results that occur after the report or plan has been implemented, and you have tracked the results you were trying

to achieve. In many organizations today, that final measurement, outcomes, is never taken! Outcomes measure the actual value you are creating and providing for the people that you serve. When your organization is focused on improving outcomes, the result will be a more customer centric organization focused on continuous quality improvement.

Make a List to Make Things Happen. When you run an organization, a department, or a team it is quite easy to become overwhelmed with information on a daily basis. While much of it may be nice to know, throughout each day there will be several items that will require follow-up, or are nuggets of good information, or ideas that should not be forgotten. I learned early on when I would do station visits as a fire chief, or meeting with one of my department teams, there would always be things brought up that I needed to follow up on and report back, or a great idea emerging from a discussion that had to be captured and evaluated further. That is why I always traveled with a note pad, or device so I could do that. Often times I would have a page of things to follow up on or several new ideas to pursue, from an hour long discussion. It is easy to get wrapped up in your day-to-day responsibilities,

looking at the big picture, and planning for the future, but if you want to make an impact, one of the best strategies that any leader can take is to go meet with the people that are doing the work. They are in the best position to tell you what is working and what is not, and often they can provide you the solution to fix it. It is also a great way to break down your bureaucracy. Try to lead and manage by walking around and talking with the people who are doing the work.

“Your role as a leader and manager is finding the optimum balance.”

A Harvard Business Review article in 2018 noted that many corporate leaders today understand that bureaucracy saps initiative, inhibits risk taking, and crushes creativity. It's a tax on human achievement. Though mindful of its evils, many people believe bureaucracy is unavoidable. I read once that bureaucracy is much like stress; where too much or too little is bad. Your role as a leader and manager is finding the optimum balance.



Chief B's Key Leadership Takeaways

Having the honor of speaking to great leaders in their profession in **The Leadership Crucible Podcast**, we make notes on the key leadership takeaways that are discussed. Will share those with you in hopes that it help you to reflect on your own leadership style, but also to provide some potential talking points that you can discuss with your team. Doing so is a great way to understand your teams, gain perspective on topics, helps you to gain a deeper understanding of how your individual team members think. It is an excellent way to build you team.

- ✓ Good leaders make people feel like they are on the best team and the team couldn't function without them.
- ✓ To be a customer centered organization, you have to put the customer first and at the center of everything that you do.
- ✓ Lead and manage by walking around and talk with the people that are doing the work. This is often where the best solutions are found for organizational problems.
- ✓ Empower people to make decisions at the lowest level possible.
- ✓ Every time someone is doing something routine, ask whether it's really necessary, or if it can be reduced or eliminated. You might be surprised.
- ✓ Often bureaucracy happens when people focus on processes and forget about what the end result should be. Remember the mission!
- ✓ A Continuous Quality Improvement organization is never satisfied with the status quo. "If it is not broken, then let's make it better.
- ✓ Continuous Quality Improvement drives organizational clarity that ultimately leads to a higher quality of service being provided to their customers.
- ✓ Performance management is essential to any organization. If you are not keeping score (measuring you outcomes) how do you know if you are operating effectively and efficiently?
- ✓ Poor metrics, poor targets, and lack of transparency is a recipe for failure.



Readers are Leaders

I believe that, to be a good leader, one must be on a continuous quest to gain more knowledge. The leadership benefits of reading are wide-ranging. John Coleman's article in the Harvard Business Review, "For Those Who Want To Lead, Read," highlights that the leadership benefits of reading are wide-ranging. Evidence suggests that reading can improve intelligence and lead to innovation and insight, and, for example, some studies have shown that reading makes you smarter through "a larger vocabulary and more world knowledge in addition to the abstract reasoning skills."

Reading has many benefits, but it is underappreciated as an essential component of leadership development. To that end, we'll provide a few suggested titles for you to consider reading.

The Delicate Art of Bureaucracy: Digital Transformation with the Monkey, the Razor, and the Sumo Wrestler

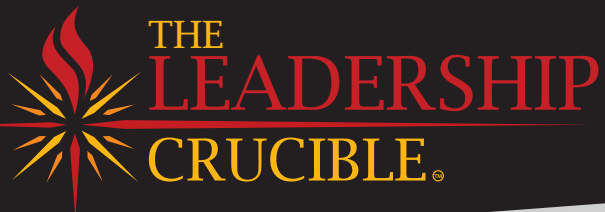
by Mark Schwartz

Lean Government - NOW!: Increase Service, Capacity and Employee Engagement, while Reducing Costs and Wastes

by Harry W. Kenworthy

The Lean Coach

by Lawrence Miller



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