



The Power of Listening Transforms Crisis into Opportunity

In any complex change, breakdowns and course corrections will occur. THAT they will happen is a given. HOW they are responded to is the make or break factor in determining whether problems result in upset, blame and cynicism or in deepened alignment, commitment and teamwork that promotes culture change and increased results.

BREAKTHROUGHS
Culture Change

“Being First was a lifesaver during this time of shifting gears and emerging new priorities. You fully understood what we needed and how to best deliver it. Thanks for helping us get beyond this crisis.”

Chief Change Officer

Challenge

Three Canadian Credit Unions had just completed their merger. Being First was supporting this process when six months into their amalgamation, a significant crisis hit. The public press revealed CEO behavior during the merger process that was seen by credit union members and employees as a breach of ethics and trust. A flood of negative op-eds, public outrage and employee grief ensued. Custom-

ers were leaving. The initial response by the Board and CEO was containment: down-playing the issues, denying any wrong-doing, shutting down the employee blog site, hoping that the situation would go away. Instead, it became a flash point for pent-up frustrations about the merger process, resulting in the CEO’s immediate resignation.

Solution

Being First took an active stance to help the executives realize that their initial reaction to contain and deny was causing the crisis to get bigger. To help the credit union move beyond “damage control” toward organizational healing and restored momentum, Being First proposed a strategy of visible and immediate action by the leadership team to turn and face the crisis rather than run from it.

The heart of the strategy was listening to employees and stakeholders and addressing the issue and their concerns directly and authentically. This required new leadership skills in crisis management, self-management, and communications. It demanded facing the human/emotional aspects of the crisis and supporting people through their upset. Luckily, we were able to convince the executives that this ap-

proach would drive toward the open, honest and transparent culture they were trying to create.

Our strategy included:

- ▶ Immediate coaching of all executives in deep listening and how to have authentic conversations with upset stakeholders and not get emotionally triggered themselves during such interchanges
- ▶ Road trips by executives, implementing a series of cascaded listening sessions which engaged all employees within two-weeks; sharing their personal experience of the crisis and openly discussing “why

values matter,” and collecting employee input on changes needed in operations and culture

- ▶ Reporting back to all employees within two weeks the plans for these changes and how employees can be engaged in them
- ▶ Coaching managers on the human dynamics of change and how to actively listen and facilitate dialogue with their teams
- ▶ Immediately announcing a new company values creation process where all employees would be involved

Results

The new CEO personally visited sites across the province, acknowledging what he learned from the listening sessions, addressing questions and concerns and committing to specific remedial action.

- ▶ Healing occurred, and the cultural tone in the company went from negative to positive in very significant ways.
- ▶ The employee blog site was re-opened; within a few weeks employee feedback turned to “thanks for listening, let’s get on with it.”
- ▶ Over the next two months 200 employees volunteered and received training to facilitate local vision and values dialogues; 169 such dialogues were held with nearly full workforce

participation; over 80% of the employees attended an optional Sunday afternoon event to select and define the values that would guide the credit union’s future. The executive team and Board confirmed these values.

- ▶ Trust in leadership was restored.
- ▶ Customer exit was stopped before any negative impact to the business occurred.
- ▶ New cultural norms regarding listening and turning into conflict were born.
- ▶ Employees became involved in the follow-up “Making our Values Real” initiatives.
- ▶ Managers learned first-hand how to support their employees through change

ABOUT BEING FIRST

Being First is a Breakthrough company, providing advanced expertise in personal and organizational transformation since 1988. We open leader’s minds, develop their self-mastery and equip them with the advanced Conscious Change Leadership skills to transform themselves, their organizations, communities and cultures.

As Strategic Advisors to the C-Suite, we provide an integrated System of Transformation that builds transformational leadership capability by providing your leaders with the consulting, training and development, coaching, methodology, tools and assessments to perform optimally and Achieve Breakthrough.

For more information, BeingFirst.com or call us at +1 970.385.5100.