Creating Balance in Uncertain Times

By: Pat Lynch, Ph.D., President

It is precisely when the world around us seems chaotic and uncertain that we most need to create and maintain a sense of balance in our organizations. Employees, customers, and stakeholders are all looking to executives for leadership. How does your team measure up when it come to providing that balance?

Often we are so focused on the short-term that we ignore important aspects of the business. An over-emphasis on one area, however, is quite likely to cause misalignment or dysfunction in other, more neglected segments. Think of a balloon: if you squeeze it in one place, the displaced air pops up in another place – it doesn't go away.

Here are some consequences caused by unbalance or over-emphasis in key business segments:

Financial – An excessive focus on cutting costs may lead to lower service levels and dissatisfied customers. The airline industry is a prime example of this type of cost-cutting run amok.

Employees – Excessive emphasis on employees may result in a situation similar to what the U.S. auto industry now faces: products that are not competitive due to contractually high labor costs and benefits.

Customers – An inordinate emphasis on pleasing customers may result in organizations that lose sight of their intended goals. Politicians come to mind: by trying to serve all masters, they often end up serving none well, or instead, catering to a few select constituencies to the exclusion of others.

Internal processes – When there is an excessive focus on rules and regulations, customers can experience frustration due to red tape and inflexibility. Employees who feel like cogs in a machine tend to concentrate on what cannot be done rather than creating ways to help their customers.

In the face of so many potential pitfalls, how do executives create and maintain some semblance of balance in the workplace? Here are fourteen practices that will help:

1. Keep the big picture (i.e., vision, mission) in mind at all times and refer to it often. Help your employees see their unique contributions to this picture.

2. Whatever your organization's situation, seek opportunities rather than bemoan challenges or negativity. Use adverse conditions to improve, re-focus, and be creative.

3. Engage in positive self-talk, and encourage others to do so.

4. Challenge assumptions.

5. Set realistic goals and expectations.

6. Be honest about what is, and is not, going on in the organization.

7. Communicate, communicate, communicate.

8. Be specific about what you want and expect.

9. Focus on helping your employees become fully successful.

10. Re-frame situations to highlight their positive aspects and seek what can be done to further them.

11. Get back to basics: focus on organizational and individual strengths.

12. Exude confidence.

13. Treat everyone with respect and dignity.

14. Set a positive example every day. Employees will follow your lead.

For an example of a scorecard that can help create and maintain balance in any organization, please see the article *Building Balance in the Workplace* on my web site. ➡

Pat Lynch, Ph.D., is President of Business Alignment Strategies, Inc., a consulting firm that helps clients optimize business results by aligning people, programs, and processes with organizational goals.