

Setting the Course through Stormy Seas

By Richard W. Robben, P.E., CEFP, MBA



Message Priority High

To: Facilities Director APPA Institution

From: University President

Subject: Ship's Movement

Make best possible speed to rendezvous with Task Force (TF) Stakeholder Expectations before start of classes in 2017. Coordinates: CHG.MGMT.

With these instructions you order a change in course and speed toward the rendezvous point, and your ship (the facilities department) turns to its new heading and speed. You assemble your department heads and work out the details of heading and speed to account for fuel on board, condition of equipment, status of the crew, and the weather for the transit. The navigator reports that you will have to sail directly through a storm that is traveling in the same direction as the ship. The engineer reports there is not enough fuel to make the trip, and one of the ship's boilers is down for repairs, which will reduce speed. The executive officer reports half of the crew is down with the flu. It seems unlikely that you can make the rendezvous with TF Stakeholder Expectations.

INTO THE STORM

Doesn't it sometimes feel this way in your daily efforts? The stakes are high. The requests seem too great, the time too short, the resources too little, the obstacles too much, and yet you have to somehow satisfy your superiors without (figuratively speaking) losing both your ship and your crew (your workforce).

The challenges at first seem to be overwhelming, but in reality can be corrected along the way with modest additional resources: Your ship can meet with a fleet oiler and replenish the bunkers at sea, the boiler can be repaired, and your vessel is made to operate in heavy seas. The real challenge in this vignette is how well your crew will accommodate change. Can they deal with the stress and fatigue of operating in

turbulent waters with less rest for extended periods? How far can the crew go before it breaks down, despairs, or abandons ship?

It is your workforce that allows for changing the strategic direction of your departments. So how is this achieved? It's all about the quality of your workforce and its willingness to pursue excellence. We have seen our workers respond to emergencies. During floods, fires, and power outages, they are energized for restoring the situation to pre-hazard conditions. Their level of commitment to the institution seems higher than during normal operations. There are good reasons for this: They have a clear objective and vision for restoring normal operations to the stakeholders, and there are usually clear accolades and recognition by the campus community for their efforts, as well as a sense of pride, because to them, it's "my space, my work home."

THE THIRD ELEMENT

This reaction to emergency situations illustrates three important aspects of change management. The first is a clear and compelling vision of your goal; it's hard to argue against getting things back to normal. The second is the recognition of success. The change management process calls for celebrating initial wins. It's very clear when you have achieved the goal. Everything is back to "steady cruising," and the stakeholders are grateful. But there is a third element. What if the workers did not know how to restore the power, did not have the necessary equipment, or were simply exhausted from continuous operations? This hidden element is a competent, well-trained workforce that is able to execute what is asked of them.

Let's go back into the "storm" to illustrate another point. Your ship has rendezvoused with the oiler and filled its bunkers, the boiler is repaired, and the ship is back on course. Although the storm is not violent, the continuous pitching, rolling, and heaving combined with illness and fatigue have degraded your crew's efficiency. You're aware of the relationship of ship's motion to fatigue and the increase in mistakes committed

by the crew, and you realize the need to take action.

HAVING ALL THE FACTS

But what should you do? If you stay the course and endures the effects of the storm, there is a distinct risk of mishap, injury, and possible damage to the ship, but doing so may get you to your destination faster.

Another option would be to move out of the storm, but this will take you off course, extend your transit time, and possibly cause you to miss your rendezvous with TF Stakeholder Expectations.

Yet another approach is to zigzag around the heading. This will keep the ship traveling in the correct direction, but gives the crew an opportunity to recover from the effects of the sea while on the less turbulent legs of the course.

In order for you to make a wise decision, you need some information: What is the current condition of your crew? Is their morale sagging or is it high? Are they well-trained enough to operate under these conditions? How long have you been operating in turbulent conditions and how much longer do you expect to be?

IT'S 90 PERCENT CREW

Planning for change is at the heart of any effort to be smart about facilities services. But in the final analysis, it's 90 percent crew and 10 percent machine that gets you to your goal. If you don't have a well-trained, motivated, dedicated, and recognized staff, you are not likely to be successful. Some leaders forget the need to "feed and care" for those that make it happen. This is where your priority should be, your real bottom line.

Train your staff well, empower them, engage them in their mission, recognize their accomplishments, provide job security, and show concern for their welfare, and your crew will follow your vision—even if it takes you into the storm. As the "captain," that should be your standing order: Take care of your crew; the ship doesn't work without them! 💰

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