

Leadership Through The Turn

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Implementing significant change in an organization is like a decreasing- radius turn for the leader doing so. You learn more about the change of direction the more you get into it and everything you learn is not necessarily good.

A recent road-trip from the Grand Canyon back to Phoenix brought this metaphor to light. South of Prescott, AZ., US Highway 89 winds around Union Mountain and descends into Peeples Valley. There are multiple decreasing radius turns as the road descends the mountain. In one short few-mile section there are seven of these turns bearing white crosses signifying fatal accidents.

I do not know the factual details of any of these accidents. There are some facts that I do know.

1. Aggressive riders and drivers know that a turn can be taken faster than the posted speed warning, but not how much faster.
2. A 500 pound Ducati sport bike can take a turn faster than a 1200 pound Harley loaded with cargo and a significant other. This is also true for a Porsche Carrera vs. any SUV.
3. Riders and drivers panic at the point they realize that the turn is getting too tight to negotiate at current speed. Panic causes wrong actions.
4. Intimate awareness of the capacity of your vehicle and capability of yourself is essential if you have decided to push the limits.
5. Paying attention and keeping your eyes focused on where you want to be rather than where you are can be the difference between getting there or not.
6. Power and brakes can be enemy or friend depending on how and when they are applied.



Defining and executing changes that improve leadership and organizational performance is a leaders mandate. Leaders of leaders don't get hired to maintain status-quo. Beyond the inherent expectation of improved performance and results is the hope/demand that it will happen faster. Some thoughts to consider:

1. Go slow to go fast. Entering the change at a safe speed provides the time for those who are essential to success to get aligned with the change in direction.
2. One size does not fit all. Your team may be a mix that is as diverse as the vehicles that traverse US 89 on a busy weekend. Some will be pulled through the turn at speeds that scare them while others will be exhilarated by the speed of change. The leader may need to coach some to slow down and others to speed up. Some may ultimately have to take a different route to a different place.
3. The change within the change is the way in which successfully negotiating a significant decreasing radius turn builds confidence, agility and resilience and a bit of excitement for the next one.
4. Like the apex of a decreasing radius blind corner, when leading change, there is a right time to accelerate in the new direction and leave the old behind.
5. Executing significant changes in direction takes more than mandate. The right decisions about route, power, brakes and timing differentiates leaders who succeed from those who become mere markers by the side of the road.



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