with speed and agility at a moment's notice. Changing standards and regulations, emerging technologies, and business risks are just a few of the dynamics managers must ...

Paul McDonald • Aug. 19, 2016

In today's business environment, public accounting firms must be prepared to pivot with speed and agility at a moment's notice. Changing standards and regulations, emerging technologies, and business risks are just a few of the dynamics managers must monitor closely. And to help their firm respond to and adapt to change

Failure #1: Ignoring change

When you see change on the horizon, your response should not be to stick your head in the sand and pretend it isn't happening.

For instance, if competitors are reducing costs and increasing efficiencies by embracing cloud technology, why should your firm resist the trend? If moving to the cloud can create potential long-term benefits for the business, the transition will likely be well worth any adjustments your team might need to make in the short term.

Instead of ignoring change, you can move your business ahead by actively seeking it out. Become a great prognosticator of what's coming in the accounting field by remaining hyper-aware of pending regulations and other factors that could cause disruptions to the industry and your clients.

Failure #2: Poor communication

The very worst thing you can do when change is coming is to not talk about it with your teams. Because if you don't, they will — as soon as they sense it. And the resulting rumors are often worse than the change actually turns out to be.

CFOs in a Robert Half Management Resources survey said communication is the top success factor when leading a team through change. Even if you don't have all the details, share as much information as you can — and do it face to face with your staff whenever possible.

As the organization undergoes change, be sure to emphasize the benefits and opportunities employees are likely to experience because of the transformation. Likewise, be honest about any potential downsides — including how disruptive the change may be. Sugarcoating issues or being unrealistic about the time and effort

Failure #3: Setting the wrong tone

Change management requires creating a sense of urgency so employees will understand the importance of the move and help the business transition. However, if you hit the gas too hard and don't give your team time to digest the news, you may end up overwhelming them or fostering resistance.

Likewise, if you move too slowly, you may not inspire your staff to embrace the transition. Their lack of interest in the initiative could undermine your organization's ability to achieve its objectives.

Failure #4: Absence of accountability

If you don't set clear roles and expectations for your employees, they are likely to feel that a change is something happening to them instead of something they are a part of. Make sure everyone is accountable, in part by assigning team members well-defined responsibilities.

When your employees reach key milestones, acknowledge their achievements and show your appreciation. This will help to keep them engaged. It will also underscore how important individual contributions are to the big picture the firm is trying to realize.

Change is hard. That statement may be a cliché, but that doesn't make it any less true. Avoiding the four common change management failures outlined above can help make the transition smoother for your employees — and increase the likelihood your business will achieve the positive outcomes the change is meant to generate.

———

Paul McDonald is senior executive director at Robert Half, the world's first and largest