

Case in Point: Full Sweep Transformation

Summary

A new CEO had an urgent and ambitious agenda: transform a large publishing group with disparate businesses into a multimedia powerhouse. **An intensely competitive and changing market had sparked anxiety throughout the company; its future was on the line.** LaserBeam did a fast but substantive analysis of the business and organization that pointed to several key problems; one was a politically charged and divisive operating environment. We developed a new strategic mission and launched a plan of concrete steps to expedite change.

Challenge

With big-picture and day-to-day changes in the market, it was critical for senior leadership to re-design and integrate its traditional and digital businesses into a formidable competitor. That meant revamping virtually every function, from design and production to marketing, and implementing change among 180 business units in 25 locations. **The business' capabilities and culture did not support the collaboration and communication needed to move fast.**

Deadline

We had eight weeks to pull together a cogent strategy—including a brand new model for leadership. That meant in-depth and new definitions for key jobs—and tough decisions on the talent that would fill them. We needed to set goals, energize the brand, and revamp expectations, compensation and incentives for a media business' key asset, its human capital.

Defining the problem

To find the company's fault lines and strengths, we led focus groups and interviewed managers and leaders. We found that:

- Management's assumptions about what its consumers wanted were obsolete. Investors were increasingly impatient to see higher revenue and profit. The company's brand was weak.
- Leaders had attacked the competitive problems—and opportunities—reactively; they had no comprehensive strategy for reinventing the business. Major issues were unresolved such as how to redefine key executive roles and how to build new franchises from existing brands.
- The internal climate was politically charged, with executives split on the most critical issues: strategy, tactics and people. Leaders, preoccupied with putting out fires, couldn't focus on the big issues. A layered hierarchy stymied communication.

Taking Action

We urged the leadership team to clarify the company's goals and to redefine roles and standards, starting at the top. This helped senior leaders articulate and implement the change with a new level of communication and transparency. And we created concrete steps and tools to use in implementing and tracking change.



We:

- Launched an initiative to create a new vision, brand and strategic imperatives.
- Worked closely with senior executives to develop serious role descriptions and accountability for leaders, managers and key contributors. The leaders completed a rigorous evaluation of the performance of current talent and talent they needed, and initiated changes.
- Led a new Leadership Forum for 140 executives and created a virtual communications system for all employees. Both initiatives were designed to open up conversation, encourage innovative thinking and push for change.
- Orchestrated programs to involve a broad range of key players and employees in re-design efforts. Rolled out a communications strategy that worked for different professional disciplines in divergent markets.
- Developed targeted plans with concrete steps for resolving differences, getting buy-in and resolving sticky issues. Demonstrated new cultural standards for transparency, inclusion and innovation.

Results

Within five months, the organization was more focused, direct and decisive, and making choices that aligned with a newly refined strategy.

- The virtual Leadership Forum became a vital tool for communicating, integrating business initiatives, and inspiring innovation.
- A more collaborative culture took root, inspiring leaders, managers and employees to embrace the change process, understand their new roles, and accept new expectations and rewards. Leaders clarified expectations, metrics, accountability and job progress, and held to crisp, new standards. Managers reported a sense of ownership and a new play-to-win mindset. **The culture changed in tone, from “we don’t like it” to “we want this, and we're the ones to build it.”**

The company created a stronger public profile and a clear and more powerful presence in new media and integrated sales and marketing. Those teams built stronger relationships across businesses and with clients. Unit heads called the new strategies “breakthrough,” and reported that they led to more creative, lucrative deals. **From the head of one major business: “This was a truly inspirational experience; a turning point in my business.”**