

3

Stage III: Changing Behaviors



Stage III is a time when you will define, model, and reinforce the behaviors that are right for your organization's growth. Because every organization is different, it is critical that you focus on the behaviors that are appropriate for your team. There's no guidebook for what those behaviors are, but your vision, values, and goals can help direct the way. Stage III is a stage of action, and it represents a distinct shift from planning to doing. At this point, you will begin to see your plans through. The problems have been identified and embraced, a road map for the future has been developed, and now is the time to focus on the daily efforts needed to move the team forward.



TEAM TURNAROUNDS

Throughout stage III, behaviors will be scrutinized, praised, and modeled. What's right for your team may not be right for others. A unique outline for how to act as a champion needs to be developed, and the focus on doing should be constant. Stage III is composed of small and consistent efforts that will steadily move your team forward, but the constant plodding can be tiring, and there may be times when advances seem to be of little consequence. This can feel frustrating and disorienting, but even when you're forced to question whether you're on the right path, keep moving forward. Stage III is not about big wins but rather about the small successes of gradual growth. Your continual efforts to teach, model, and reinforce what's right will pay cumulative dividends as they start to add up.

This stage is tedious at times, but it is an early stage of development, and behaviors for future success are being defined. Your team members will learn how to carry themselves as winners, and you're responsible for showing the way. Leaders in stage III have to focus on providing their teams with insights into how and what they need to change while also providing the motivation to do it. All eyes will be on you as the leader, and your ability to actively teach team members about how they can change for the better is essential. Equally important is your ability to model what success looks like while also establishing winning guidelines. Throughout this stage, behaviors will change for the good as previous, losing habits are broken and even the smallest of successes are celebrated as evidence of progress.



CHANGING BEHAVIORS

Ani Shabazian, Marilyn Masaitis, and Kim Mulkey are three leaders who have effectively turned their organizations around by modeling winning ways while shaping the behaviors of their teams. All three of these leaders turned failing organizations into thriving entities in little time and have profoundly impacted the groups they have led. Although they share minimal common ground in their backgrounds and professions, their ability to change the behaviors of struggling teams with confidence, compassion, and consistency is noteworthy. Ani Shabazian took over the Loyola Marymount University Children's Center (LMUCC) at a critical moment of failure, but she was driven to change the defining behaviors of the team. Marilyn Masaitis bought a failing diner on a heartfelt hunch, and she modeled how to be a success. Finally, Kim Mulkey, head coach of Baylor University's women's basketball team, has made a Hall of Fame career out of molding her players and teams into winners. All three leaders have masterfully guided their organizations through stage III, changing the attitudes and behaviors of their teams en route to profound and oftentimes unexpected achievements.

TEACH BEHAVIOR

In stage III, change is afoot, but as the team sets out in this newly defined direction, the old ways must be left behind. Ani Shabazian took over the Loyola Marymount University Children's Center when it was in profound disarray. The center had

TEAM TURNAROUNDS

degraded to the point where child safety was in question, and turning it around was a formidable task. Shabazian was dedicated to teaching her team the behaviors needed for success. It was a tough sell, but Shabazian believed that with time and persistence, the group could provide world-class child care services to the Loyola Marymount University (LMU) community.

In 2006, the behaviors of the staff at LMUCC were woefully suspect. Cathy McGrath, a mother of two and a professor at LMU, had entrusted the center with the care of her children, and she says of those days, "It would just be a mess." There were complaints and concerns regarding sanitation, the education and interests of employees, and the general care of the children enrolled. When Cathy walked in one day to find her youngest daughter, an infant, swaddled tightly in a blanket and lying on her stomach for naptime, she reacted. "I just sort of grabbed her," she recalls. "It was such a visceral moment. I just picked up my daughter and ran out of the center and was just, like, 'Oh, I don't know if I can bring her back there.'" It's dangerous for newborns to sleep on their stomachs, and they can suffocate when swaddled tightly and left lying facedown. Cathy was right to be concerned, and at the time, she arranged for her babysitter to take on more hours.

During those days, concerns were warranted. Enrollment was down, the relationship between the facility director and parents was caustic, and programs were canceled. It wasn't that the teachers and administrators were intentionally neglectful or abusive—make no mistake, it was a caring and affectionate

CHANGING BEHAVIORS

team—but it was as if they didn't wholly understand the toll of their mistakes, as if they didn't know better. One child had contracted Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), a highly contagious and difficult-to-treat staph infection, outside LMUCC. Cathy recalls watching a teacher who “changed one child's diaper, put that child down, picked up another one, and put him right back on the changing table without changing the paper, without wiping it down with a cleaning fluid like they're supposed to. And this was right during the time when they were having the outbreak of staph.” It was clear that the need for change was vital.

Cathy's story is reflective of a widespread loss of trust between parents and the LMUCC leadership and staff. This led to a minor restructuring that had a major impact. Responsibility for LMUCC was moved from Finance to Human Resources (HR), and Rebecca Chandler, vice president of HR, and Heather Alexander, director of Benefits, headed up the early change effort. Initially they set out to find what was broken, and they proceeded to fix it. First they gathered up data in an attempt to diagnose the problem. They conducted a comprehensive satisfaction survey and held open forums to hear employees' concerns. As Rebecca remembers, “That data really set our charge for us because there was high dissatisfaction, there was high turnover, there was low morale, there was a lack or a huge deficit in staff engagement, and so we knew that our charge was to try to turn this unit around.” Rebecca and Heather truly believed that the center could be better, and so they established a vision for turning it around, identified

TEAM TURNAROUNDS

key goals and values, and then started to act. They began with a search for a new director, and eventually they scored with the hiring of Ani Shabazian.

Landing Ani was a big win for LMUCC. In spite of her initial refusal, Rebecca and Heather persisted until she came aboard. With a Ph.D. in child development and five years of experience running the Infant Development Center at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Ani brought instant credibility. She had received her master's degree in education from Harvard, and while at UCLA she had been awarded the Distinguished Faculty Teaching Award, an honor recognizing the most skilled "masters of the classroom" on the basis of letters from colleagues, students, and former students in addition to course evaluations. Ani also had the temperament for the job. She's warm, she's passionate about child development, and she was confident enough to overcome early concerns.

When Ani arrived, the situation was a mess, and she admits to having felt overwhelmed, but she had committed to changing the center and refused to back down. She initially relied on education. She set out to ensure that all the teachers at the center actually had the necessary education to perform their jobs. Astonishingly, they didn't, and as Ani worked to implement this initial change, certain teachers immediately lost interest in staying at the center. Some didn't want to pursue further education, but for those who did, Ani acquired funds from the university to pay their expenses. She recalls that the teachers who didn't want to stay "naturally sort of left because



CHANGING BEHAVIORS

they knew that they'd have to put in more time and more effort in order to still maintain the same job that they had six months prior." In short order, the team was changing, and Ani was doing everything she could to make sure that the changes would stick for good.

Education comes in many different forms, and multiple efforts to communicate information are more likely to stick than one singular effort.¹ With this in mind, Ani was committed to educating her staff in multiple ways. Although she insisted on a minimum educational level, she also worked to personally convey information to her staff members in order to ensure that they would avoid falling back into poor habits. Remember Cathy's story about children's diapers being changed on a table that had not been adequately sanitized? Ani says, "We started with health and safety. We got them bleach bottles. . . . I trained them on how to do the bleach, and I trained them on health and safety practices, how to use gloves when someone is bleeding." These personal efforts also included pointing out unacceptable behaviors. In one instance, Ani walked into a classroom and noticed a teacher listening to an iPod. She confronted the teacher, explaining that it was inappropriate to be in a classroom with an iPod on. By pointing out specific examples of behaviors that were no longer acceptable, and by working with staff members to help them adopt new behaviors, Ani was continually promoting change.

While Ani was focused on helping the group members understand what they needed to be doing on a day-to-day

TEAM TURNAROUNDS

basis, Rebecca and Heather were educating the staff members about how they contributed to the larger university. "They needed education and awareness of how they fit—the contribution that they make, and how important what they do is to the university," says Rebecca. She and Heather were encouraging the staff to change as individuals, and once again Rebecca recalls that it required "talking, listening, meetings, lots of meetings, bringing in other people from other areas so they could explain to them what they did." Behavior change is best supported through multiple efforts and channels, and staff members at LMUCC were being supported through formal and informal education led by Ani as well as through the reassurances of Rebecca and Heather.

Beyond the benefit of multiple education methods, behavior changes within teams are best supported by environments where people feel safe to make mistakes and are supported by their leaders.^{2, 3} In addition to the efforts Ani was making to educate her staff, she needed to foster a safe environment where ideas could be shared and mistakes could be made. When she arrived at LMUCC, the climate had been the opposite of safe. "It was interesting," she recalls, "because when I first started, I felt that everyone was scared to death—or not necessarily scared, but everyone had their guard up, and I'm pretty approachable." Ani went straight to work, breaking down barriers and taking the time to invite the ideas and perspectives of those around her. "I did a lot of observations," she said. "I had one-on-ones with all the staff members. I met with them, I talked with them." Ani developed trust by making

CHANGING BEHAVIORS

herself accessible. In the process, the staff began to know and understand her.

While the one-on-ones were helping to build rapport, Ani worked to create safety in other ways as well. Just weeks into her new position, an irate parent came into Ani's office, screaming. In a measured and neutral voice, Ani said, "Let's have this conversation when you're a little more calm." Not only was the frenzied parent shocked by Ani's unruffled response, a nearby staff member also expressed surprise. Ani was curious about her staff member's reaction, and later she asked her about it. The staff member replied, "The former director would have yelled back." Ani's efforts were in stark contrast to those of the center's previous administration. More important, the calm manner in which she handled conflict helped to foster a supportive environment, one that encouraged the behavior-change efforts she needed her employees to embrace.

Through these efforts, the ball started moving. The behaviors of the group slowly started to change. Rebecca recalls, "The staff was now being held accountable in ways they were not accustomed to." Parents were taking notice of the professional demeanor of the teachers, and the teachers became more heavily invested in the changes that were taking place. Enrollment began to rise, and the children's center was soon getting attention for its achievements.

Cathy McGrath, the once apprehensive parent, tells a story that illustrates the drastic behavior changes that occurred among LMUCC staff members. One morning her husband dropped off their youngest daughter, Jane, between two and



TEAM TURNAROUNDS

three years old at the time. He noticed his daughter back away, as if scared, from a seemingly aggressive child who was eager to play. Cathy's husband immediately voiced his concern to the teacher that his daughter might be getting bullied. The teacher listened, and over the course of the day she took three or four pictures of that child and Jane playing together. She e-mailed the pictures to Cathy's husband, explaining, "I thought about what you said, and it's a really valid concern, and wanted to let you know that this is how they interact during the day. Also, to address your concern, we've decided to seat them next to each other at lunchtime so that they can pass the food and the bowls to each other so that they can have another way of interacting that's collaborative and cooperative." Cathy was amazed at the immediate response.

The center slowly progressed from being an organization in crisis to delivering a reliable service to eventually becoming highly respected in the industry. When she arrived at the center, Ani held the seemingly far-fetched goal of the center's becoming accredited, and by 2010 LMUCC had joined an elite 8 percent of child care centers nationwide by receiving full accreditation. In 2011, Ani and the children's center were still growing, but all the smaller efforts had begun to add up. She still had challenges, although the challenges she is facing today have changed. She explains that enrollment numbers are now through the roof, and she jokingly laments, "My poor administrators are being harassed constantly with 'Where am I on the wait list?' and 'Why can't I get in?' You only have 105 spots, and there's 1,600 people on campus. I can't





CHANGING BEHAVIORS

accommodate them all.” Clearly, the problems are drastically different from what they once were.

Ani hopes to one day transform the children’s center into a lab school, where children and families can be monitored and assessed through the university as a means to further the discipline of child development. Changes continue to occur, but it seems that the more things change, the more changes Ani has planned. As Ani says, “We still have so much room for growth. We’re constantly growing, and I think that’s a strength. When you think that you’ve stopped growing is when stagnation sets in.”

For LMUCC and Ani, growth is the theme, and progress is a continual effort. The turnaround has been dramatic, but in the early phases the focus on behavior change was critical. Through formal and informal education, through the reassurance of organizational leaders, and through Ani’s persistent encouragement of positive change, early goals were achieved. Throughout stage III, Ani and LMUCC were simply focused on adopting the right behaviors.

MODEL BEHAVIOR

Beyond educating team members about how and what to change, you must exemplify the change you want to see in your team. Stage III is all about action, and your own actions are incredibly important, not simply for what they accomplish but also as a way of communicating information related to



