

Successful Supervisor Part 50

Moving Toward a Teal Environment

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

In 2015, my dear friend and fellow author, Bob Vanourek introduced me to a book entitled “Reinventing Organizations,” by Frederick LaLoux. It was a great read, and since that time I have brought some of the thinking process into my own consulting work, since it is entirely compatible with my views on enlightened leadership.

I wanted to introduce the concepts in this series for supervisors because moving in the direction of what Frederick called a “Teal Organization” is a thinking process that can take one very far down the road toward a more fully engaged workforce.

Defining a Teal Environment

When Frederick described the characteristics of organizations, he outlined a sort of progression where organizations can move from being hierarchical and rigid to being much more self directed and fluid. He gave several typical organizations names of colors so they would be more memorable. Here are some of the colors in his progression.

1. Red Organizations

Red organizations are like power structures where the group with the most authority lords over all of the other groups. They are characterized by fear and submission. The leader is all powerful and runs the organization with a firm hand. The model is one of impulse. It is a game of survival of the fittest, and many organizations today are run on a red model.

2. Amber Organizations

These groups are strong and very hierarchical. For example, a military organization might take on the characteristics of an amber organization. It is the traditional organizational pyramid that is so familiar. The idea is to have stable, well controlled processes that are replicable and predictable. There are many rituals that must be adhered to, and individualism is discouraged. To thrive in an amber organization, you need to stay in your box and do your job as prescribed.

3. Orange Organizations

Here we see a wider view of what must be done, and processes are well defined. Innovation is encouraged. Advancement is based on merit and tenacity. The key element to describe an orange culture is achievement. This type of organization fueled the industrial revolution and the explosive growth after World War II.

4. Green Organizations

As we progress toward more teamwork and a family feeling toward work, we see some signs of empowerment showing up. The world of the green organization is more pluralistic. Here people are encouraged to think for themselves as long as they stay consistent with the organization's values. The focus of green organizations is on maximizing shareholder value.

4. Teal Organizations

LaLoux goes on to envision a type of organization where the focus has shifted to where the ego elements are less pronounced and people become free to do what they believe is right. The focus is on a kind of wholeness that takes a broader view of why the organization exists in the first place. The emphasis shifts from pleasing shareholders (owners) to serving all stakeholders, including the environment and society. Individuals engage in the work because they truly believe in the cause, not to just earn a paycheck.

Moving in the direction of Teal

I recently did some training work for an organization that is on the path toward a Teal Culture. My observation is that you never completely arrive at the perfect system, you are always seeking to grow and morph into a better paradigm.

The road is not without hazards and twists and turns to navigate, but having a vision of a more thoughtful approach to doing work and having all people actively involved in the journey is a pleasant way to get things done. My observation is that people are much more satisfied when working in this environment. It is not a picnic for everyone, however. Some people would rather be told what to do and even how to do it.

To manage a Teal environment means giving up the rigid authority of the Amber or Orange style of management in favor of a more engaging culture where a broader slice of the population participates in the decisions and hence has a larger stake in the success of the organization. This higher level of ownership means greater productivity and satisfaction in the end.

If this idea sounds intriguing, you might want to pick up a copy of "Reinventing Organizations" by Frederick LaLoux. You will find it entertaining, and it will probably have you thinking of moving to a more Teal-like culture for your place of work.

This is a part in a series of articles on “Successful Supervision.” The entire series can be viewed on www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision or on this blog.

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