



IMPACT STORY

City of Meridian, Idaho

ExperiencePoint®

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Tearing Down Silos: A Human-centered Approach to Change

City of Meridian, Idaho

Meridian is the third largest city in the state of Idaho, with a 2014 estimated population of 85,000 residents. The City government's mission is to cultivate a vibrant community by delivering superior service through committed, equipped employees dedicated to the stewardship of the community's resources. It has a stated vision that by 2035, Meridian will be the West's premier community in which to live, work and raise a family.

Challenge

For more than two consecutive decades, the City of Meridian has been the fastest-growing city in the state of Idaho. Its population tripled between 1990 and 2000 and then doubled again between 2000 and 2008.

While growth has been a positive, influencing factor in Meridian's success, the explosion in population has also brought with it the need for an expansion of services, the addition of other small- and large-scale changes. Meridian city leaders found themselves facing a dilemma that any organization undergoing rapid growth can relate to: how do you plan for and stay ahead of growth rather than getting stuck in reactive mode playing catch-up?

“We’re a City that grew really fast, and we’re continuing to grow,” says Meridian Fire Chief Mark Niemeyer. “We realized we needed to set the City up for a better future, and that meant establishing the vision to help the City meet the growing demands.”

In other words, it was time for the City to start thinking more strategically and planning for its long-range future. While two of the departments—fire and public works—had already completed internal strategic planning processes, the City as a whole hadn’t. And although those two departments’ leaders, Mark, Chief of the fire department, and Tom Barry, Director of Public Works, believed a citywide strategic plan would be valuable, they also realized a citywide effort would require a shift for many of the people and departments involved. Because of the rapid growth, departments were on their heels trying to keep up.

It was a lesson they’d already learned on a smaller scale through their own departmental experiences.

“After 9 months of working on our strategic plan for public works, we took it to the City Council,” says Tom. “And it was very difficult to get them to understand, let alone embrace, the idea and benefits of strategic planning. They struggled with the concept of a five-year plan and what the implications would be.”

Not only that, Mark says that thinking strategically would be a new experience for many of the people involved.

“One of the biggest challenges we faced early on was getting everybody to understand what strategy really is and how to think strategically in the work environment,” he says. “A lot of folks wanted to go down to a tactical view right away.”

As a result, Tom and Mark felt strongly that someone outside the organization should facilitate the process, with a goal of helping people understand what strategic planning is, what it does for an organization, how it would affect their people and processes, and why it would be important to the

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City’s future. A skilled facilitator would ensure they could get the buy-in and support for the activities that needed to be done.

Fortunately, they knew just who that facilitator was.

“Phil Eastman of Leadership Advisors Group is well-known as someone who can bring people together to collaborate on strategic planning,” Mark says. “He has a great reputation, and we knew he could drive the baseline discussion to get all of the department heads within the City to take ownership of the process and see it through.”

The author of several leadership-focused books, including **Dimensional Strategy**[®], Phil is the principal advisor of Boise-based Leadership Advisors Group, which focuses on leadership development, strategic planning facilitation and change leadership.

As the Meridian leaders discussed their goals with Phil, it became clear that strategic planning alone wouldn’t be enough to help them get where they wanted to go.

“Whenever we work with organizations to help them facilitate the strategic planning process, we always point out that change capabilities are necessary for a strategic plan to be successfully executed,” Phil says.

The Meridian team recognized that they didn’t have the depth of change capabilities they needed. There had been change processes in the past that hadn’t worked out as well as they could have, and they knew that a comprehensive, citywide strategic plan would require them to up their game even further.

“We realized that we needed to look at how you manage change, because strategic planning inherently has change built into it,” Mark explains. “We had to understand what’s involved in leading change in an organization.”

Leadership Advisors Group was prepared to help Meridian on both fronts.

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Tom Barry

Director of Public Works

Solution

When it comes to change, Leadership Advisors Group works with leaders to help them understand what they need to do to properly align, unify and engage the team successfully. They use a number of tools to build these capabilities, including a proprietary Change Engagement™ framework and ExperiencePoint’s ExperienceChange™ simulation.

A change facilitator since 1998, Phil uses the simulation as a way to reinforce their model and give people the experience of working through change, particularly the human aspect of change, something that often gets overlooked.

As Mark points out, “In the fire department, we tend to live in this five-minute world of rushing to mitigate a problem. We’re really good at mechanical change—what we have to do or the policy we have to develop. We needed to get more comfortable with the human components of change and understanding how to achieve buy-in.”

With so much on the line, the group was wary of implementing traditional, change management training. To truly build ownership and engagement, this couldn’t be a typical instructor-led lecture or PowerPoint slideshow presentation. They needed people to roll up their sleeves and dive in, and Phil was confident that ExperienceChange™ would fit the bill.

In all, 52 participants across the City government, including police, fire, public works, parks, the City clerk’s office, the Mayor’s office, information technology services, community development, legal and human resources, participated in ExperienceChange™ workshops facilitated by Leadership Advisors Group.

“We chose to use ExperienceChange™ because it is a very succinct delivery of powerful ideas, and it’s done in an atmosphere that allows people to succeed and fail without the consequences being too high,” Tom says. Phil adds that the flexibility of the ExperienceChange™ framework made it easy to overlay Leadership Advisors’ Change Engagement™ framework and use it as a bridge to progress through the various

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stages of analysis, planning and implementation. By discussing outcomes upfront, and then mapping the model to the framework, he was able to make it seamless for the participants so they could immerse themselves into the experience.

Department directors identified the people within their areas who should participate in the training, focusing on those who would have decision-making responsibilities related to the initiatives, projects and budgets that would ultimately cascade out of the strategic plan. **The workshops were structured so that participants were teamed up with people from other departments, giving them the opportunity to collaborate outside their everyday silos as they worked through the simulation’s change journey.**

Results

Working with Leadership Advisors Group and building change leadership capabilities through the ExperienceChange™ simulation has already delivered results for the City of Meridian in one very tangible way: the strategic plan is finished and has been adopted by the City Council. With 5 specific focus areas, 20 broad goals and 75 objectives the City is already seeing benefits from the experience.

“One of the biggest takeaways my fire department members had, especially in our world of public safety, was getting a better understanding of how to process the human components of change—how to achieve buy-in to change, the hierarchy of when to discuss things with certain people—that was a big takeaway for us,” Mark says. “It’s a change of mentality that doesn’t happen overnight, but it really showed us that we have to think about the human side versus just a ‘get it done’ mindset.”

The simulation also eliminated any concerns that this would be a dull training event. The interactivity provided a game-like experience that engaged participants in the process.

“ExperienceChange™ was very well received because it was interactive, experiential and in the

moment,” Tom says. “With the real-time interactive response that it provides to decisions that are made by the team, you can see the result of those decisions immediately.”

Phil also points out that this allowed the participants to see the impact when things went right and when they didn’t, all without putting any of the municipality’s resources at risk.

“With ExperienceChange™, the opportunity to experience the highs and lows of a change, the wins and misses, all within the 8-hour time period—and without paying a ‘real’ price for them—is invaluable,” he says.

Beyond the ins and outs of change, the simulation experience has also sparked a new level of cross-departmental collaboration within the City. Like any growing organization, staff has expanded to meet the demands of growth, but that can make it difficult for people to get to know each other, especially those they don’t work with directly or on a regular basis. By intentionally teaming people up with colleagues from other departments, the workshops helped people get to know their colleagues, and it also gave them a better understanding of the strengths available to them in other departments.

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Phil Eastman
Principal Advisor,
Leadership Advisors Group

“Now, I see my staff reaching out more to other departments when they have something they may be stuck on, or if they have questions,” Mark says. **“This experience really opened up the opportunity for good dialogue and cross-departmental collaboration.”**

As the City continues on its growth trajectory, that collaboration is sure keep them poised and ready to step up to tomorrow’s challenges today, while ensuring Meridian remains a vibrant community and a premier place to live, work and raise a family—no matter what changes come their way.

Phil Eastman

Leadership Advisors

Phil Eastman combines more than 30 years of leadership experience with his passion developing leaders, building teams, and enhancing performance.

Phil has served in numerous corporate and community leadership roles. His corporate experience includes 17 years in the banking industry. After achieving progressively more responsible corporate positions, Phil chose to pursue a career where he optimizes the individual and organizational effectiveness of leaders.

As an advisor, consultant, teacher and coach Phil works with a growing and diverse group of clients in a variety of industries and countries. His leadership experience and expertise have made him a sought after speaker and advisor to organizations in the United States, Canada, Asia and Australia.

Phil is the author of *The Character of Leadership: An Ancient Model for a Quantum Age and Dimensional Strategy: A Leader's Guide to Building a Strategic Plan*.

About ExperienceChange™

ExperienceChange™ is an expert-guided experience that teaches a best-practice model for managing change. Backed by over 20 years of change research and industry insights, the experience enables leaders and managers to practice leading change and engage with the behaviors, tools and skills sets that make change happen.

ExperienceChange™ is the trusted tool for Fortune 500's and the world's leading business schools. It's the cornerstone of change initiatives that transform, leadership programs that enable, and learning events that inspire.

About ExperiencePoint

At ExperiencePoint, we're passionate about how people work together to get stuff done. We're an award winning training company that develops business simulations for leadership development in the areas of change and innovation. We're known for realistic simulation experiences that challenge people to roll up their sleeves and learn the Whats, Whys and Hows of leading change and innovation.