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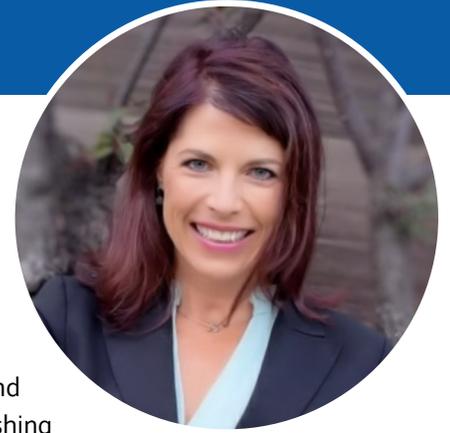
7 Steps to Conquer Challenges in Your Business

Tony Kubica and Sara LaForest

Helping executives and entrepreneurs achieve results through a people-centered approach

Who Am I and Why Can You Trust Me?

I am Sara LaForest, an entrepreneur, consultant, coach, instructor, and author with comprehensive experience in the private, nonprofit, education, and government sectors.

I am on a mission to empower entrepreneurs, executives and leaders to grow their businesses and help them create flourishing workplace environments. If you share this mission, these articles will introduce my approach. I believe you will find them helpful and pragmatic.

For more than a decade, I have grown, managed, and nurtured my own companies specializing in leadership consulting, organizational development, and executive and performance coaching. My focus is on the critical—yet often overlooked—interdependencies of strategy, branding, culture, and talent necessary to foster and propel growth. My high-touch, personalized approach helps leaders improve company performance and team functioning at all levels, while facilitating a positive and productive workplace culture.

How am I different? What new perspective do I bring? My strength is combining company growth with an emphasis on the personal growth and well-being of the people with whom I work and serve. My deep-rooted commitment to human advancement is my advantage.

This article, along with many other national and international published works, was co-written with my retired partner, Tony Kubica. Our book, *Organizational Gravity: A Guide to Strategically Growing Your Company's Brand, Culture, and Talent,* is available on Amazon.

To learn more about my services, publications, and speaking engagements, please visit LaForestConsulting.com. You can contact me directly at Sara@LaForestConsulting.com or via LinkedIn.

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Improving Performance

Navigating Transitions

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We've all heard one of our employees say, "If we haven't thought of it, then it isn't worth doing. No one knows our business better than we do." Your organization has caught the "not invented here" syndrome. Consultants have seen this for years. Department managers and employees use it to fend off outside influences from other departments or intervention from consultants and advisors. Regardless of where the invasion comes from, protectionism is the defense.

"Not invented here" is a cliché, but, like many clichés or popular beliefs, we think there is truth in the statement. However, the truth is that "not invented here" is a problem, and it serves as a form of organizational resistance to change. "Not invented here" conveys an important message: "If I am not involved with defining the situation and working on solutions, then I am not interested in your ideas, opinions or solutions."

When a challenge presents a threat to your business, you need to take action. Ignoring the problem leads to a further deterioration in performance. Ideally, the members of your organization possess the skills, knowledge, objectivity and ability to identify the problem and implement the required change. If one of these elements might be missing from your team, you may want to consider using outside resources to supplement and focus your team's abilities. Your outside consultant must do this in a way that takes the personality and abilities of each member of your team into consideration. We suggest starting with the following process.

1. **Understand the Problem** – Do this before anything else is done. Take the proper amount of time to talk with and listen to people, both inside and outside the organization. Look at the numbers and compare it with the general marketplace, the economic trends and the trends in your industry. Objectively understand the issues. If this step is missed, a good solution will only occur by pure chance.

2. **Identify Options** – Whether it is in a brainstorming session, a general discussion, in a series of meetings, or in any other organized forum, it is important to identify potential solutions. At this stage, it is important to identify all solution options and not just one solution. Many people stop at the first or easiest solution.

3. **Select an Option** – To select the best solution, as determined by the group and the evidence, there should be healthy discussion or even a vibrant debate. The risks and gains of each option should be vetted before an option is selected. It is at this point when the influence of the owner, unit head or outside third party should be tempered to discourage "not invented here" behavior. The whole group must contribute to increase the chance of implementation success.

4. **Understand Cost of Implementation –** You need to know what it will take in time, money, personnel and other resources to implement a change. When a solution is chosen, detailed planning must occur so everyone involved in the implementation fully understands the investment and commitment required for a successful outcome.

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5. **Prepare an Action Plan** – Your plan should describe...

    - What will be done (the task)
    - Who will do it / who is responsible
    - When it will get done
    - Important milestones or benchmarks
    - Resources required/anticipated
    - Remember, in most cases, whoever has assigned responsibilities for this project also has another job to do, as few organizations today can afford to put a dedicated team on a project. This is why an Action Plan with tasks, due dates and individual accountability is important.

6. **Implementation** – This needs to be managed and managed well. Regular status meetings must be held to track implementation progress. If the project is getting off track, awareness should swift and corrective action should be taken, immediately.

7. **Evaluation / Post Implementation Follow-up** – After implementation, the working group should evaluate lessons learned. Ask questions: What went well? What could have gone better? What was learned in the process? Did the change initiative have the desired result?

If these steps are followed, the chance of successfully implementing a change effort will increase. It will increase because the members of the organization most effected by the change initiative will have been involved with the problem and solution identification. This is a powerful engagement and retention strategy. It's your business. It's your future. Take hold of it and "invent it here."