

NO MORE YAWNS

HOW BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNERS CAN GENERATE BUY-IN, OWNERSHIP, AND PARTICIPATION

BY MICHELLE MORRA, EDITOR, CONTINUITY E-GUIDE



Business Continuity planners tend to be naturally gifted in technical matters. Planners often don't focus on the softer skills such as team-building and effective communications. If you find it difficult to motivate people to get on-board with BC planning, you are not alone.

For BC planners who are tired of seeing people's eyes glaze over when asked to participate in business continuity activities, Phil Lambert, president of The Center for Continuity Leadership, recommends three steps to generate buy-in:

1. Engage, equip and empower people in the business unit;
2. Simplify the BC process and;
3. Measure results.

We asked Phil to explain:

Step 1: Engage, Equip and Empower

Q: WHY ISN'T EVERYONE AS EXCITED ABOUT BC PLANNING AS BC PLANNERS ARE?

A: The people we work for are focused on their day to day activities and are not BC planners like us. They are accountants, software developers, middle managers. They don't want to hear every detail of our vast business continuity knowledge. They want to know how BC relates to them specifically and how it can add value to their work. Adults need to know three things: why we are doing this, what's in it for me, and what's the step by step process.

Q: HOW CAN WE MAKE BC RELEVANT TO THEM?

A: Think like a sales person. Consumers don't buy a product unless they can envision it making a difference in their own lives. The same goes for BC planning. People buy into BC planning not only because it can minimize loss from a potential disaster, but because it will add value to their day to day operations.

Q: HOW DOES BC CREATE SO MANY BENEFITS?

A: You're really dissecting every one of the processes within a business unit. For each process, you're getting people to think about what would happen if a process were forced to move to another location; what would happen to those dependencies they rely on. We sift through the entire organization to find out who is dependent on who, and for what. This process takes people out of the daily grind and they begin to recognize opportunities for positive change.

Q: WHAT QUESTIONS WOULD YOU ASK?

A: I always start the continuity planning process by getting to know the manager, his/her operational priorities and what current initiatives they are working on. I would also ask, "If you could improve one aspect of your business unit, what would it be?"

Then I'd go straight to the matter by asking, "What are your thoughts about BC? Is it important to you? Why or why not?" I think it very important to be genuinely interested in a continuity planner's customers, the people in the business units. Presenting a short,

on the spot scenario will also challenge their thinking.

Q: WHAT, IN YOUR EXPERIENCE, HELPS PEOPLE CHANGE THEIR ATTITUDES AND TRULY BECOME ENGAGED IN THE PROCESS?

A: You can walk people through the process of developing the plan, but the real winner is the exercise. Survey after survey, year after year we find that we don't train enough, and part of training is exercising the plan – simulating disaster scenarios and asking people how they would respond. Once they've experienced and walked through a real scenario, they start thinking it very well could happen to them.

Another thing that turns people around, unfortunately, is a disaster, or hearing about a disaster in a nearby company. We've been motivated by fear in this industry for a long time. I don't particularly like the fear factor as a motivator, because as soon as people get over their fears, they stop participating. You need more reasons to participate besides fear.

Step 2: Simplify the Process

Q: FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE OVERWHELMED WITH BC AND SEE IT AS COMPLEX, HOW DO YOU MAKE IT MORE ACCESSIBLE?

A: You really want to put yourself in people's shoes. Build a step-by-step process that is easy to follow. We use charts, diagrams and templates – things they can understand at a glance. For example, you could use a flowchart that shows the decision-making process of a first responder. Flow charts help people quickly understand what needs to happen next.

Q: WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

A: Ambiguity is one of our industry's biggest problems. Thinking about Plan B when Plan A fails seems to be a fairly easy task. Everyone is an expert when they first learn they will be developing continuity plans. But once you start the process of planning and start digging into people's processes and find the intricacies of what makes a company tick, it can get complex pretty fast. Stay focused on the task at hand, keep the process simple and communicate your message with clarity and distinction.

Q: WHY AREN'T WE BETTER AT THIS?

A: BC planners are not trained to be people experts. We don't learn about negotiating, project management skills, how to lead meetings, or how to listen carefully. A planner's job is only half done when the plans are ready. It's working with the people and when they know how to respond, control and manage an event, that's when you have a resilient organization.

Step 3: Measure Results

Q: WHAT AND HOW DO YOU MEASURE?

A: There are two aspects to measure, activity and quality. You can start by keeping a scorecard of the business unit's activities. Develop a six step updating process and use these six steps as milestones and measure whether the business unit has completed each step on schedule. I use green for on-time delivery, yellow for slightly behind schedule, and red for those tasks that are significantly behind schedule. People work well with timelines. Before we even begin the process of updating a plan we always get a buy-in and commitment to the schedule. People commit to working through the process step by step and on time. They report back about every two weeks and we generate a scorecard for all to see. People really don't like red marks next to their name!

Q: HOW WELL DO PEOPLE RESPOND TO THIS?

A: A simple scorecard can work miracles. I've seen a continuity program go from a 38% completion rate over a year to 93%, just using the scorecard. By doing this I'm also opening up a level of communication and expectation with the business unit. People actually like to be held accountable. As a BC planner my job is to help the business unit be successful, no matter what might happen in the future.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Phil Lambert is the Founder and President of The Center For Continuity Leadership (CFCL). He has over twenty-five years experience in training design and sixteen years of business continuity experience leading BC programs in two Fortune 500 companies before establishing CFCL in 2004. He can be reached at (425) 670-8700 or www.continuityleadership.com.