

THE LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

PART FOUR

Why Doesn't Change Last



Introduction

Why do some of the most promising ideas quietly disappear?

Organizations invest enormous amounts of time, money, and energy into change. They hire consultants. They provide training. They redesign policies. They launch initiatives with genuine hope and commitment.

Yet, months later, many of those same organizations find themselves asking, “What happened?”

An Experience

I remember walking into the building a few weeks after the initiative began. The lobby looked different.

New posters lined the hallways. The organization's commitment was displayed where everyone could see it.

The language found its way into meetings, newsletters, policies, and presentations. People were talking about it. Looking around, it felt as though the organization had changed.

Then the workday began.

The pressures were still there. The expectations were still there. The systems were still there. The measures of success were still the same. The environment people returned to each morning was still the same.

The more I've thought about experiences like this over the years, the more I've realized they aren't unusual.

We had changed what people saw. We hadn't changed what people experienced.

Most of us have lived through at least one initiative that genuinely felt like it was going to change everything. For a while, it seemed as though it did.

Then, somewhere along the way, the excitement faded. Not all at once. Quietly. Almost without anyone noticing.

That leaves me wondering: Have you ever noticed how some ideas seem to change everything... until they don't? Have you ever walked into work one day and realized the excitement was gone... but you couldn't quite put your finger on why?

Why?

Change often begins with visible signs. New language. New training. New policies. New expectations. Those things matter. They communicate intention. They signal commitment. They give people a shared direction.

But people don't spend most of their day reading mission statements or looking at posters on the wall. They spend their day working within an environment.

And every environment teaches.

It quietly teaches what is expected. What is rewarded. What matters most. How success is measured.

When that everyday environment remains the same, people naturally return to the behaviors it has reinforced all along.

I've come to believe that lasting change rarely happens simply because people learn something new. It happens when the environment consistently supports people in living what they've learned.

What does the environment your people return to every morning teach them?

I've come to believe that the answer to that question often tells us more than any training evaluation ever could. Don't good ideas deserve an environment where they can grow?

YOUR LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

At your next leadership meeting, ask a different question:

What does the environment our people return to every morning teach them?

Then listen carefully. Not for the answers you hope to hear... but for the everyday experiences your people describe.
