Hello and welcome you’re listening to the Change Agent’s Dilemma for Tuesday April 19th 2011. I’m your host Heather Stagl coming to you from Atlanta Georgia, as I do once a month on blog talk radio. This show is one of the many ways to help equip individuals to lead organizational change at Enclaria LLC. The Change Agent’s Dilemma is how to influence change without authority, and I like to invite guests to the show who have figured out how to this, and today my guest is Paige Lillard. She is the vice president of business excellence with Turner Broadcasting System Incorporated, where she is responsible for the development and attainment of organizational strategies for over 16 business units worldwide including CNN operations, international ad sales, and Turner’s global technology and IT divisions. Key emphasis is placed on developing and supporting high performance leadership teams, balanced strategy development, customer and employee focus, and business process optimization. Paige has extensive experience with the Malcom Baldrige framework for performance excellence, and is a three year veteran of the Board of Examiners governed by the National Institute of Standards and Technology under the U.S. Department of Commerce. Paige holds an MBA from Kennisaw State University and a Bachelor of Arts in Radio and Television from Hofstra University. Her volunteer efforts include her work as a founder and past president of the Georgia Center for Performance Excellence, and co-chair of the Kennisaw University Executive MBA Advisory Board. Turner Broadcasting System is a Time-Warner Company, and is a major producer of news and entertainment products around the world, and the leading provider of programming for the basic cable industries. Turner Broadcasting is located in Georgia and employs over 9000 people worldwide. Many people are familiar with Turner ground breaking network; CNN, and Turner is also home for familiar entertainment network such as; TBS, TNT, Cartoon Network, Turner Classic Movies, Adult Swim, and True TV. Paige, thank you so much for being here.

Thank you for having me, appreciate it.

So I said that you are responsible for development and attainment of organizational strategies, so what does that mean in English?

What that means is ensuring that those goals that the company has from the corporate level, actually are achieved, and that only happens when you have all the different working pieces within the organization; have operational plans and capabilities that can actually make that happen, so when it comes to all the change happening in business today, for organizations whether they are business, nonprofit, education, healthcare, there are so much change going on, and organizations will set a goal, but often they do not know exactly how to achieve that goal, all the different components of the system that needs change in order for them to be successful for that goal. So that’s what my organization does, we have a small consulting team within Turner Broadcasting to help our division worldwide to make that happen.

Ok and you’re using Malcom Baldrige at Turner right?

Yes, that’s the primary framework that we use.

Can you give a brief explanation of what that is and how it works?

Sure, the Baldrige Framework is a systems methodology and framework that is recognized at the national level, the President of the United States gives out awards each year to organizations who have proven and it is basically proven by the Board of Examiners who assess the organization, that they have sustainable, successful business practices. And if they receive the award, part of the process of applying for and receiving it is they share their best practices with the community. So it’s a reinforcing cycle of organizations that are using the framework; it helps them ensure long-term success and continuous improvement and then they share their story and their approaches with other organizations ,who then can take them and use them, and it propagates the use of the framework and the competitiveness of the United State globally.

Ok great, so on a daily basis, you and your team are working with business units within Turner to establish this framework or use this framework in order to help execute strategies for Turner.

Absolutely, you said it in like five words.

(laugh) I’m just summarizing what you said…so, but that’s not what you, you haven’t done this, this whole time, you’ve been with Turner for awhile you, you have an interesting background, so I want to hear your story on how you got where you are.

Sure well, I started with the company many years ago, I’ll be with the company actually for 23 years this summer and I started as an audio engineer working in, shifts from either 9am to 6pm or 6pm to 2am, doing everything from live audio that we would send for example we aired the Grammys in Latin America and I managed the translations from Portuguese to Spanish, or it would be sent to all our Latin American countries and I edited music for things such as The Goodwill Games and the coverage of the Olympics, throughout the year did a lot of music editing, sound effects creation, I did mix audio for cartoons, like Space Ghost, the original cartoons that we did, so I had a lot of fun, it was a very creative field, although technical at the same time, but about 4, 5 years in to my audio career, it was going well and I enjoyed it, I started to feel like I might be built for something different. I was sitting in testing, typically by myself , the producers would come in and give me my materials, and tell me what they expected and I would go about doing all the editing and mixing and they would come in later or next day and listening to the final product. So I ended up kind of sitting by myself, in the studio for many, many hours on end. And being an extrovert, the extrovert that I am, after a while I thought that this was fun, but it was not what I am meant to do. So I wasn’t sure what I was for the first time since I was twelve I didn’t know what I wanted to do. Because when I was twelve years old I knew that I want to broadcasting television radio type of thing for me, so I loved the industry and the field, but I wasn’t real happy, and I started to feel less and less happy with the day to day activities that I was doing, so I also recognized within the organization within our production department which is internal to the company, that we had opportunity to do things differently with our customers, and our processes, and our staff, and so I started to read and be exposed to the concept of total quality management, and this is back in the early to mid 90s, and I absolutely connected with the concept of total quality management, which is a focus on the employees of the organization and leveraging their engagement and their knowledge, getting them involved in creating processes and improving things, understanding that they are the primary connection to the customers, so how do you engage them in building better systems, which makes them more interested in what they’re doing, get more out of the staff and they get more out of working with you. And also focus on the customer, focus on measurements, really knowing fact-based decision making rather than, who screams the loudest, or any political situation who has relationship, so instead of basing business decisions on that, the quality field focuses on actual facts. What does the data that say? And of course to triangulate that, with a lot of the qualitative information you get in the field, you can make better business decisions. And there is also a big focus in the quality arena on leadership, how do leaders lead? And how do they motivate employees, set direction, vision and strategy for the organization? And then how do they deal with the change of organization that needs to change? How do they manage through that? All those components to me seemed so much like a no brainer, so obvious, but it’s really difficult to have all those things in motion at the same time working together to move the organization forward, so I compare it like a golf lesson, your first golf lesson, where if someone told you all the things you need to do all at the same time as far as have your shoulder this way, your knee that way, and your foot this way and swing this way and hold the club like this, you simply can’t, it seems insurmountable to remember all these things at once and have that first swing out of the gate be perfect, and it takes thousands of swings, and focusing on one thing at a time in order to get there, so I became absolutely passionate about the potential for this kind of approach to our business. So I started to talk to some folks within the organization, my boss who was the manager at the time for the idea department and he thought it was great, sounds good, of course, again it’s a no brainer in theory, but the question is how do you execute? And I was just learning at the time and he kind of said, this is really interesting, but I don’t know what to do with it. And he was just over one small department, so I said well; can I just go ahead and just talk with our VP then? And he said sure, if you can get this stuff done, it would be great, because I think it’s all really good sound business principle, but I don’t know how we would execute it here in our department.

So I started to talk to the VP and though I said I talked to him and he was interested and there was a lot that went into my preparation of talking to him, nervous and what should I say and how should I say it but I did my homework and I talked to other people who had made pitched to him and been successful in their pitches to him and those who weren’t and found out the best way to approach him and how he liked to hear information, etc.; and I asked him what keeps him up at night, what were his equivalents of what we call now his pain points, what keeps you up at night, what would you like to see changed, and at the time he said I would love to unlock this concept of employee engagement or get more out of the staff, let them bring their whole selves to work rather than they are at a factory doing something and then they leave to get them engaged to a point where they are really passionate about what they do. And I said okay I’ll come back to you with a proposal on some things we could do and he said okay so I went back and about two weeks later made another appointment and brought him a white paper and at the time there wasn’t really the Internet so I was going to the library and bookstores and looking up in the old-fashioned books on what actually makes up employee motivation. I made a real brief 2-page white paper and there were some things that we could do. It has to do with recognition, the opportunity to recognize employees, to connect them with hey, what you did with the other night made a big difference on our air, it was a great thing, you went out of your way, it was recognized, the customer was happy, that type of thing, a system to do that and we did not have one that so it was one of the early projects I took on, to create a recognition system that was actually driven by, created by the staff. And he supported it with whatever money you need to, for the awards or prizes or whatever so the employee team made the proposal to him and he accepted it so we kind of started building some of these systems that really are the foundation, the building blocks of a performance excellence system, and as I kind of worked through that in the audio department kind of how I really started to learn about the Baldrige framework. I thought there was a huge opportunity to bring all these different tools together in one system and that is really what the Baldrige framework does. And I wanted to show him experiments to see if this setup could actually work but if you give a couple of people and I can kind of break off my department into a sub-department, and I could lead it, then I’ll actually put these processes of this Baldrige framework into practice and see what happens. So eventually he gave me the opportunity and I was supervisor of a whopping staff of 2 (laughs), starting small, obviously, but over time, the first 6-9 months, I could show that we increased customer satisfaction 23%, I increased employee satisfaction 50%, increased our capacity of our room like 65%, and that was the ending business result that he really wanted to see was that happier customer and the happier employees, were actually bringing in more business. And within a year and a half of starting we actually doubled the capacity; we invested in another suite altogether, audio suite for us. And then I grew the staff by the time I left I was so busy doing all these performance excellence things within the department I couldn’t do audio anymore I had built the team to 8 or 9 full-time sound designers. So then we created a brand for ourselves out in the world and capturing more work than we could handle, so it was really an interesting process we went from a place where I first started as a supervisor I couldn’t get people to apply for jobs cause it was a trend, everybody was moving out to a lot of the smaller startups within Atlanta, and there was such a huge flow of talent to these other places, interestingly enough by the time we kind of created these systems I wanted to make sure we earned the reputation of a really cool place to be so that we could either get back some of the talent or pull talent from other places, and so even today we have people knocking down the door trying to get into the company. It’s a really cool story of being able to affect that change within the organization from the inside out, it starts with who’s inside the organization and how they feel like they are treated and led and respected and recognized and how much they feel they can bring to the organization and create change themselves so we have a lot of employee teams and eventually over time my bosses recognized us for the success we had with our division and I asked him to take on another division. After a time he called me up and said can you do this again Paige with another? And I said of course I can and I stepped out of his office and said, how am I going to do this? I hadn’t yet at the moment created a repeatable process but I did using all the tools and implemented it in our network operations group and then my boss was promoted over additional engineering groups and spanned over to the CNN business side from the entertaining side and he is now CIO. As he grew this is the primary framework that he uses within all of his business units and his purview includes global which I think is great because it gives me the opportunity to work with folks in other countries, and other cultures which is wonderful, so it was an interesting kind of progression, shall we say and he and I are partners in this concept of performance excellence.

I love hearing people’s stories, nobody ever starts . . . they always start somewhere else and discover a new model.

There wasn’t such a thing as a model.

Yeah right.

Looking at different models gets you thinking about how things could be and starting to seek out and apply it. See who’s going to listen to me and then go and do it. It was interesting that as you were telling your story a couple of things stood out to me, that the boss was willing to let you talk to the VP and let you go over his head and another was that the VP was going to listen to you and schedule a meeting with you.

I took advantage of one thing the VP was great; our department was only 80 – 100 people but he always said during after your review, I have an open door if you want to come in and talk to me, and he really wanted all the employees to talk to him; but he let it be their decision; a lot of people took him up on it because they wanted to connect with him as well; a lot of people grew up in the business with him and also saw it as an opportunity to reconnect with him, that’s why I leveraged that opportunity to introduce this stuff to him that this is what I am interested in doing I love what I’m doing in audio it’s great I’m winning awards that’s wonderful but I think we can make things even better. And it’s such credit to him to be open to someone from down inside the organization that just had an idea and then you know, the trust with his organization to give it a shot and just bring people together and then lend me his credibility by saying hey I have asked Paige to do this in fact when I started the first time I started this in 1996 during the Olympics we were super slow here in Atlanta because everybody assumed the traffic is was going to be gridlocked and usually the summer is slower because our production cycles are on a hiatus so we had some time during the summer to do some extra activities so I said why don’t we do some manager training during that time period about these tools because people had seen the sound design group kind of growing up from nowhere so and so I did three 2-hour leadership classes on the concepts on the framework and leadership and all that. I remember the first one I did and I don’t know how old I was but I was standing up in my mid-20s probably a ripe maybe 1-year supervisor and there I was telling 30-year veteran, dyed-in-the-wool TV production guys how to be a leader and I’m sure when I look back at that they were looking at me like who in the world does she think she is and either I was naïve or I had guts of steel to say, you know, whatever, either they get it or they don’t get it at least I’m going to try to share this information with them and if they get it, they will get something out of it and they will take some benefit which would be great and those that can’t get the message they won’t but the great thing was that Dan when he introduced me was he lended me his credibility and he said Paige is learning this, this field and I’m really interested in moving along this direction and she is just two steps ahead of us, myself included, but we’re going to take this trip together, this journey so I really appreciate the time she has put into it so I want you guys to the things she is learning and what we can do with them in our organization so him just being able to lend me that credibility right off the front was a huge step and that’s the kind of executive leader or senior leader buy-in that makes everybody else stop and listen. I’m sure a lot of them went away and went “yeah, whatever” but I’m sure some people actually said, you know, this is kind of interesting and I could actually benefit from these no-brainer concepts about leadership and listening to your people and caring about getting them involved in driving change because they are the ones who are on the front lines and talking to the customer every day. And so, it’s just kind of funny looking back on those early courses that I taught and sometimes I wonder what was I thinking but it worked.

Sometimes being naïve is the best strategy, the common sense approach. So we’re back to where you are today, Vice President of Business Excellence and you’ve got a team of your own going out globally to implement the framework in different business units so looking back what are some of the key skills that you can identify to help you be influential in the organization and to make things happen.

I was thinking about that, I think several things are probably key for folks to have influence like that. I think one is a sense of humor and maybe just some guts to take a step out to do something out of your comfort zone but if you really believe in what you are doing it is going to help the organization; I think that being humble and not taking yourself so seriously makes people give you an opportunity to open up to your message a little bit more so I certainly think it has a lot to being personal able, being authentic with people, real about why I am bringing to you what I am bringing to you, here’s the value I think it has for the organization, so being organizationally focused on . . . and also understanding what’s in it for me on the individual level as well with whoever you are talking to; what are their needs; for example when I talked to the VP the first time I was focused on him, what keeps him up at night, do they want to see change in the organization to make it be more successful, that type of thing and so I focused on what’s in it for him and the organization as a whole so it had nothing to do with me and everything to do with the organization. I think that’s one of the critical components; you have to be authentic about that; it has to be truly what your focus is because otherwise people will certainly see through it. People have made, you know, pitches for things, it looks very self-serving I don’t know if it’s the approach they are taking or their attitude while they are doing it but it doesn’t seem like it’s for the greater good or the benefit of the organization overall or they just simply don’t connect. And so I think that has a lot to do with it. And truly having earned the reputation already, if you’re within an organization having earned the reputation as a hard worker, someone who knows their craft well, so they respect you for the work you have already done in your field, and then I think a huge component is I earned my chops in my new field so I went out and I got certification from the American Society for Quality so I could actually have you know a certification behind me that I understand and know this field well I became an Examiner for the state using the Baldrige Framework for three years, and then I went and got my MBA I was in an Executive MBA program at Kennesaw State University then after that I was an Examiner for three years at the national level for Baldrige. So all those things I think help build your credibility for those people who care about that and there are those who really do and other people really just care about do you really know what you are talking about are you truly a subject matter expert based on the words that you’re saying. So you really do have to know your field but then you really have to have relationships with people and have built a foundation where they respect you , they know you and even if they like you that would be great. A great sense of humor, you can talk to people, you’re casual with people, you’re not uncomfortable, it makes it so much easier trying to influence them if there’s a natural progression of your relationship with them instead of an unnatural, forced experience for them, does that make sense.

Yes.

I would say certainly say being personable, having relationships with them having built that foundation, a good sense of humor because not everything is going to go your way and when things mess up which they always will and certainly I’ve had plenty of mistakes and things that I’ve done and I went “oh that didn’t go as well as I had hoped”. People will cut you a break if they know you and they like you oh this wasn’t the greatest meeting Paige but I’ve had great ones with you and I know you have better ones coming up but things went wrong but that’s okay.

They know you care about the organization and you care about them and what they’re going through.

Right. And you have to rely on your expertise and you’re not leading them down a path of futility, you actually have results, you have to deliver results, otherwise you can be a great person and nice and all that kind of thing and actually sell the concept but if you can’t deliver the results then you haven’t got the full equation.

And even in your story the results spoke for themselves, like when you were done, like when you had demonstrated results in the audio department and then somebody said can you do this over here, right?

Exactly. Then within the audio department our VP asks, can you, you know, can you do this in all the production groups and then once we get it there, can you also add the graphics group to it and so we were including them and then we had department-wide management meetings every month, it was the opportunity for them to learn, the opportunity for them to get information about the new systems we were implementing like employee surveys, customer surveys, and they had to be an active, play an active role in all of the tools so every month we had a session and people wanted to be in those meetings which was great, they really didn’t want to miss them because they were part of the in-crowd, so to speak.

It’s a great story and we’re actually almost out of time so we need to wrap up so I just want to ask one more question what is who is your favorite Turner Broadcasting station?

Now you’re going to get me in all kinds of trouble.

Maybe just your favorite Turner department or . . . . what to watch. . . .

We’ve got some, I would definitely have to say hands down Conan I was absolutely so excited and beside myself when we got Conan which was such a tribute to this company because he could have gone anywhere and he chose from what I’ve heard and what I’ve heard him actually talk about, this organization because of the people here, the leadership here is fantastic, he gets freedom to do things that he wants to do and you know, we trust him, and I was out on the lawn when he came to say hello and we surprised him with all the employees out on the front lawn hearing them all and playing Eye of the Tiger because he had landed after he had had that very difficult experience and he was so excited to be here I just love watching him he’s great I think he’s really innovative so I’m a big fan so I guess I would have to say Conan.

Well thanks so much Paige I really enjoyed hearing your story and I really appreciate your time, so thanks for being here.

Thank you so much, I really appreciate it.

(program ends)