



Management and Performance Associates – May 2012

Change to continue at the podium

We can all see we're living in an age of paradoxes. One of these paradoxes is the permanent need to change in order to stay in the same place. The paradox within the paradox means that to stay at the same place you need to position yourself at a higher plateau of excellence.

This month we're sharing a success story that perfectly illustrates the previous paragraph. We had the privilege of interviewing German Hartenstein, General Director, and João Palomino, Director of Content and Journalism, from ESPN Brazil.

MAPA – *For the last few years, ESPN Brazil has worked hard to move from analog to digital transmission of all its programming. What caused this change?*

João Palomino – First, this change was due to the inevitability of diving into the digital age. Not doing so would prevent us from working not only in the local market, but also the international one, since ESPN Brazil is connected to the ESPN worldwide network. Another trigger to the change was the need to technologically level with the other networks. Furthermore, digital information makes transmission easier, in addition to providing the sports fans with a much more visually attractive program.

MAPA – *Being the leader of ESPN is extremely challenging. ESPN has been recognized for its excellence in programming, as well as for adhering to its mission and values, especially when demanding its professionals perform at the limits of their potential. With that in mind, what was your strategy to kick-off this change from analog to digital?*

German Hartenstein – The first step was to look for the engagement of all departments and employees. Without their commitment nothing would be accomplished. This commitment was obtained with the clear communication of strategic needs and sharing the vision of what we were looking for. We

also hired a consulting company specialized in managing large projects. Such a project requires time, dedication and participation and our headcount is not enough to conduct a project of this magnitude. I supported this consulting company to be successful in this project, involving Finance, Production and our engineers from head office. The results were positive, placing us in an internal benchmarking position in project management. The lesson from the start was: If we want it, and we work together, we can accomplish anything.

MAPA – *Give us an analogy, so that our readers who work in other businesses fully understand the magnitude of this change.*

João Palomino – The impact in our operations was not so dramatic, for example, as in the introduction of sound to silent movies, because the change did not require change in content. The closest analogy would be moving from VHS to DVD. On the other hand, the whole process of generating and transmitting data in the new platform impacted practically everybody. For example, the stage production crew needed to find solutions that supported the new requirements of HD transmission, as well as improving framing and lighting.

MAPA – *It is natural and predictable that change important enough to move people out of their comfort zone generates emotional responses. What have you observed as these reactions evolved?*

João Palomino – Given the complexity and magnitude of the change, at first, reactions included anxiety and fear. As our teams received training and information they were able to better understand what was coming. They became even more apprehensive. But, as they got involved and dove into this transition, they realized that the beast was not as ugly as was originally thought. We have now concluded the fifth and most important of the six phases of the process of digitizing our channels. We



all feel proud of the accomplishment this represents.

MAPA – *Experts say people need time to deal with these emotions and that the quality of leadership can accelerate these reactions and prepare them to respond in a positive manner to the requirements of the transition. As leaders at ESPN, what have you done to facilitate this process?*

João Palomino – What we did, and continue to do, are basically two things:

- 1) Disseminate the acquired knowledge as fast as we can, to as many people as possible—so they can rapidly absorb the information.
- 2) Our leaders demonstrate their strong personal commitment to what they want to happen, through higher proximity and receptiveness.

MAPA – *Palomino, your testimonial supports and validates an observation made by John Kotter (an author of several books and articles about change): the need to maintain clear, constant and assertive communication.*

MAPA – *Another recommendation made by change experts is to commemorate. What has been your strategy to celebrate important accomplishments (so as to keep the team energized) without declaring victory too soon (and generate frustration)?*

German Hartenstein - We used a strategic methodology to choose priorities, and then identify tactical and operational steps. We also established clear and concrete goals, identifying responsibilities and deadlines. We then built huge scoreboards including all steps and deadlines, one for each of the two buildings we occupy. This information enabled all employees to be aware of the project. Therefore, we had clear criteria to commemorate and celebrate the completed steps. When steps were not completed on time, the responsible teams would come up with alternatives to solve the problems caused by the delay. Production is ready and the last step – satellite distribution – will be ready during May. Sport fans will notice the

implementation of this last step by the increased quality in the transmission of our programs.

MAPA – *John Kotter states that the number one reason many organizations fail when implementing change is the absence of a sense of urgency. What would you suggest to our readers to identify the opportunity to propose and initiate change?*

German Hartenstein – Here at ESPN we always say that the good is the enemy of the great. The “good” keeps us in our comfort zone. The search for the “great” generates a positive nonconformity – the search for the best: the best technology, product security, and the capacity to connect with the North American platform. This nonconformity brings the sense of urgency which is needed to change in search of excellence.

MAPA – What could you share with us about the biggest learning points of your successful career as the leader of ESPN?

German Hartenstein – There are several leadership models, and not only one which is correct. Companies are different from each other, they operate in different industries, with different cultures, living in a different cycle and, therefore, they need different leaders. I have some important beliefs that determine my actions:

- 1) Communication and transparency:
Communication generates commitment and results.
- 2) Another core belief is the team. A team which is capable of working productively generates results infinitely better than the most intelligent people working alone. Challenges strengthen teams and prepare them for future challenges.

These two beliefs demand a lot from leaders. It is easier to make a decision by yourself and ask people to execute it than share a decision, as it takes time and energy. On the other hand, commitment generated by the possibility of influencing different points of view is much higher and the quality of the decision brings a higher return.



A company is nothing more than people playing in teams. We can buy the content we transmit in relation to sports rights, one day we will have it, another we won't, but what really makes a difference are the people and their accomplishments as they play in teams.

MAPA Consulting would like to thank João Palomino and German Hartenstein's collaboration and accessibility for the writing of this issue. We are sure that reading about their experiences and lessons learned was very insightful for all of us.

See you next time. We welcome your feedback.

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