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## How is your company creating new leaders?

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Every day, the Wall Street Journal reports news about major corporations recruiting leadership talent from other companies.

Executive search firms are flourishing because of the demand for strong leadership talent. If economic growth continues at a modest 2 percent for the next 15 years, there will be a need for one-third more senior leaders than there are today.

To make matters worse, the supply of 35- to 44-year-old managers is declining and will have dropped by 15 percent between 2000 and 2015.

Top companies are beginning to understand that sustaining peak performance cannot be achieved through just the recruitment of top leadership talent.

Instead, companies are investing millions of dollars in leadership development and have made a commitment to developing leaders at all levels in the organization.

So what is your definition of leadership? A simple but effective definition that I use is "the ability to achieve results."

Earlier conceptions of leadership were little more than descriptions of good managers. But our understanding as well as expectations for leadership has come a long way over the last decade and the requirement for a 21st-century leader will be even more complex. They will need skill sets and abilities that will allow them to achieve success in a global and more dynamic economy.

Lured by the desire to develop leaders and the promise of instant success, companies have been writing checks for everything from whitewater rafting trips to 360-degree assessments without asking critical questions about program design and actual accomplishments. Most leadership programs have a half-life of only a few days or weeks after the end of the sessions.

When developing a program, you should ask what success looks like for your company and what results must be accomplished.

Next, determine the gap between what your managers and leaders have and what they need to achieve the desired results. It is easier and effective to focus on results, and then grow and develop your people to ensure that the results are achieved.

By linking the direction of the organization's strategic plan to the development of your leaders and managers, you will produce an organization that is better aligned. The results are increased productivity, greater efficiency, and increased profit margins.

So, how do you increase the effectiveness of a leader and achieve positive long-term results? Even though millions are spent annually on developing skills and knowledge for leaders, the lack of knowledge is not always the root of organizational problems.

For leaders to truly achieve success they must also develop attitudes for success and goal based behaviors. When this happens, individuals will better utilize the skills and knowledge they already possess.

Additionally, for a development process to be successful, it must start with support and participation from the top. Senior management must be involved, either as participants or teachers. Top executives must also be prepared to practice the techniques taught in the classroom, leading by example, or interest and commitment will fade.

Leadership development occurs over time; it is not a one-time event. Think of leadership development as a long journey, and build a process for long-term learning.

Repetition is also important because the average person, when introduced to an idea one time only, retains about 2 percent of what they have read or learned after 16 days. Therefore, development processes should be designed in modules, have repetition and be delivered over a period of time.

A good example would be an individual attending a two-hour class every week or two to cover a specific topic. Between sessions, each individual would work on their action plan to achieve specific objectives.

As mentioned earlier, programs must also provide participants with practice opportunities upon returning to the office. If an organization is to provide practice opportunities, involvement from executive leadership will almost always be required.

Marshall Goldsmith and Howard Morgan conducted one of the most revealing studies on the

effectiveness of leadership development programs.

They reviewed programs at eight major corporations. Each company had the same goal for its leaders, which was determining desired organizational behaviors that align with actual practices.

Companies, however, used different methodologies: offsite training versus onsite coaching, short versus long duration and traditional classroom-based training versus on-the-job interaction.

As Goldsmith explains: "Rather than just evaluating 'participant happiness' at the end of a program, each of the eight companies measured the participants' perceived increase in leadership effectiveness over time. 'Increased effectiveness' was not determined by the participants in the development effort; it was assessed by pre-selected co-workers and stakeholders."

The participants' ongoing interaction and follow-up with colleagues was the determining factor central to achieving positive long-term change. Leaders who discussed their own improvement priorities with coworkers showed striking improvement.

Leaders who failed to maintain ongoing dialogue with colleagues showed improvement that barely exceeded random chance.

An executive coach is also a method that companies are now using. In many ways, an executive coach functions as a personal trainer, reminding the coach to do what he or she intellectually knows.

A good coach spends more time on execution than on theory - they challenge the individual, hold them accountable and help them identify obstacles to their success.

Leadership development is a critical element for the success of your organization, so a number of support functions must be in place to reinforce the need to learn and the motivation to use what they have learned.

Ultimately, the companies that do the best job of creating leaders are founded on a culture that values and rewards leadership. Additionally, performance appraisals should be altered to tie salary increases to demonstrated leadership behavior.

A company supports leadership development through challenging job assignments, outstanding bosses, effective mentoring, financial and promotion rewards, performance feedback and on-the-job training.

Furthermore, a development process must be built for long-term learning. Leadership development occurs over time; it is not a one-time event.

In other words, a three-day program will not transform anyone into a leader. It may create awareness, but that's the limit. The challenge is not in understanding the practice of leadership. It is in practicing the understanding of leadership.

How do I define a leader? To me a leader is someone that combines the vision and curiosity of a dreamer with the practical engineering of a builder.

They define and establish the culture while they are driving the organization to achieve measurable outcomes with the anticipation of success. A successful leader creates their future by achieving the results that will move them closer to their vision.

Do you have a leadership development process in place for your people so they can help achieve results and, ultimately, your vision of success?

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