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Supporting roles can lead to starring ones.
Jena Abernathy

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The Road Less Traveled

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When Mary Barra became CEO of auto giant GM in January, it was hailed as a watershed moment in the industry. **PG.06**

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Leadership Inversions

Tops and bottoms, beginning and endings.

👤 By Ken Shelton

News item: Leaders at General Motors, Oracle and DuPont are proving you can move up from HR bottoms and humble beginnings, exceed environmental goals, and sustain a positive and progressive leadership inversion—all the way to the top.

But alas, many people today appear to be trapped in negative and regressive *inversions*—**upside down** in everything from mortgages to management. It's mayhem—and it's only January, named after *Janus*, the Roman god of gates and doors, beginnings and endings (hence he is depicted with a double-faced head, each looking in opposite directions: to the Old Year and to the New Year, the door to fresh **New Beginnings**).

Video

Indeed, as I write this note, we're experiencing a **winter weather inversion.** Cold air is trapped beneath a cap of warmer air, resulting in pollutants and dirt/dust particles trapped near the surface, suspended—unable to travel up or out. Hence, the air is murky, and dense smog leads to reduced visibility and to respiratory and other health problems.

To escape the cold, polluted condition and find warmer, fresher air, you need to set a **high bar**—or **Barra**—and move up, as I did, to the mountains.

Barra: From HR to CEO at GM

The appointment of **Mary Barra** as CEO of GM was a first for the auto industry, reports **Jena Abernathy**, Senior Partner of executive search firm Witt/Kieffer (see her article in this issue). Jena says that gender isn't the big news. "What strikes me as more of a breakthrough is the fact that Barra served as the leader of HR, which, in many cultures, is considered a non-starter for moving up. It's rare that executives—male or female—can move from a *support function* into an *operational function*, thus enabling them to ascend to the top role. Often very capable, competent women remain in support positions, but Barra moved into other roles that enabled her to gain more operational experience and exposure, and

Video

ultimately positioned her for the top job at GM."

The lesson: "Other executives can make the move from support to operational roles if they think strategically about how to do it," says Abernathy. "Barra's HR background actually gave her an advantage—creating the right culture can be the silver bullet for success. Leading the HR function helped her to cross boundaries and build her future. It's all part of good governance, succession planning and sustainability."

Oracle: HR Can Play a Bigger Role

Many CEOs want CHROs play a more strategic role, but their lack of *commercial awareness* and operational performance prevents most of them from exerting this strategic influence. Heads of HR can increase their influence, and that of the HR function, by being more useful to the CEO in six ways: 1) **developing a personal relationship**—acting as a sounding board to the CEO's ideas, offering feedback on the CEO's performance, and becoming a confidante and informal executive coach; 2) **ensuring that the senior executive team is working effectively as a unit**—doing this job well will make CHROs even more indispensable to CEOs; 3) **impressing colleagues with suggestions on how to implement business strategy**—CHROs need to understand the commercial side of the business; 4) **pushing to be included on the Board of Directors or Executive Committee**—this is how CHROs can develop relationships, gain relevancy, and explore executive issues; 5) **focusing on financial issues that matter most to the CEO and CFO**—being

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creative and proactive in solving these problems will clearly show their value; and 6) *taking initiative in developing the people strategy*—both the CEO and CFO want the CHRO to be a partner.

Following these guidelines enables HR to increase its strategic impact beyond that of a support function. Place yourself at the heart of your company's strategic direction.

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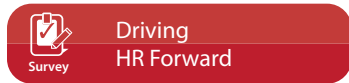
DuPont: Meeting Sustainability Goals

In its new *Sustainability Report*, DuPont announced it has achieved most of its 2015 sustainability goals three years ahead of schedule and made substantial progress on the rest, reports Linda J. Fisher VP and chief sustainability officer. "At DuPont, *sustainability* is a growth strategy. This report illustrates the progress made against our voluntary commitments and the integration of sustainability into all operations."

According to Fisher, DuPont was one of the first companies to set environmental goals (21 years ago). "We broadened our sustainability commitments beyond *internal footprint reduction* to include *market-driven targets* for revenue and R&D investment. The goals are tied directly to business growth, to the development of safer and environmentally improved new products. By collaborating with customers, governments, NGOs, and thought leaders, we can solve such global challenges as providing enough healthy food for people everywhere, decreasing dependence on fossil fuels, and protecting life and the environment."

Since 2004, DuPont has generated $6.7 billion in revenue from products that reduced greenhouse gas emissions; cut the company's greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent; lowered global water usage by 12 percent; and invested $4 billion in R&D programs to develop products with direct, quantifiable environmental benefits for our customers. Plus, DuPont is investing $3 million daily on R&D to produce nutritious and affordable food in ways that are sustainable for our environment and natural resources. **LE**

Ken Shelton
Editor of LE, 1984-2014

Ken Shelton

The Road Less Traveled

Supporting roles can lead to starring ones.

👤 By Jena Abernathy

🖱 Interactive

When Mary Barra became CEO of auto giant GM in January, it was hailed as a watershed moment in the industry. Barra is the first female chief executive of a major automotive manufacturer—an even more noteworthy accomplishment within a male-dominated industry whose top executives have traditionally been "car guys."

The media also focused its attention on the fact that Barra was a GM lifer, having worked her way from a college internship to the top job over the course of three decades. What was largely overlooked, however, was the fact that Barra travelled an unconventional executive path, including taking on lower-profile roles outside key operational areas like engineering or manufacturing. In 2009, her career peaking, she took the unusual step of accepting the position of VP of Global Human Resources—what is often viewed as a *support* rather than *strategic* position. For many executives, this would have been a dead-end move, but not so for Barra, who used HR as yet another platform upon which to prove her leadership abilities.

To me, this is what is remarkable about her becoming GM's CEO. In my experience as an executive and executive recruiter for more than 25 years, I have found that very few organizations consider HR and other *non-strategic* or *non-operational* executive functions as legitimate pathways to the top. It is no coincidence that these support roles are frequently occupied by women, meaning that many female executives who have broken through the glass ceiling still get stuck in a side office within the C-suite.

Female or male, here are *seven ways that leaders in support functions can keep their career ambitions lofty* and even use their experience to their advantage:

1. Don't allow yourself to get pigeonholed. Avoid the temptation to always reach for the next rung on the ladder within the same functional area, especially if you are outside "core" or "critical" operations within your organization. Challenge yourself to broaden your knowledge and skill sets. For Barra at GM, that meant meaningful stints in product development, purchasing, and supply chain, as well as HR.

Video

2. Take calculated risks. To get the experience and credibility you need, move out of your comfort zone. This often means changing jobs and jumping to a different type of organization or industry, or making unconventional lateral moves within one company (as Barra did, even as GM faced bankruptcy and potential extinction). Also be willing to take on tough, "high-profile" projects and assignments which can be high-risk but high-reward.

3. Go all out. I always say, you can't be a little bit CEO. If you want to ultimately rise to any dream position, commit the time and personal resources to preparing yourself for a tougher, more expansive role.

4. Keep score. If your work is outside the spotlight, make sure to keep track of your bottom-line success and be willing to share the results at the right time, in the right setting. Prove yourself to be adept at execution through visible results that can easily be measured.

5. Act like you belong. It is easy for executives moving up the ranks to defer to colleagues who are more senior or "better positioned" within the company. Even though you may lack the authority and salary that others enjoy, have confidence that you belong at the leadership table. A former mentor used to remind me, "Never let them see you sweat."

6. Use your distinctiveness to your advantage. More organizations are looking for outside-the-box thinkers. If you have risen through the ranks via a non-traditional route, promote the fact that you have a unique perspective on how to lead and what your company or institution needs.

7. Be on the cutting edge. In many industries, technology in particular levels the playing field. Build a reputation for staying ahead of the curve and knowing how to leverage technology to make a difference and get results.

Mary Barra found success by doing it "her way," which other ambitious leaders can take to heart. To break out of a traditional hierarchy and still reach the top, take chances and pursue new paths. Don't be afraid to diversify your experiences and executive portfolio to promote your professional brand. **LE**

Jena Abernathy is senior partner with the executive search firm Witt/Kieffer. (**WittKieffer.com**) Her practice focuses primarily on CEO and C-suite-level assignments. She has held numerous senior executive positions in human resources and other areas for several leading healthcare firms.
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Read her co-authored article in Trustee Magazine on effective CEO succession planning in healthcare.

Creatively Maladjusted

Why you should become such a leader.

By Dan Holden

Interactive

Martin Luther King announced in 1963 he was "proud to be *maladjusted*." There are certain realities, he argued, we should not entertain and need not adjust to as leaders.

I find Dr. King's slight twist on the word *maladjusted* to be liberating. Our business world requires *high adjustment*—yet 65% of leaders fall in the *Socialized* or *Reactive/Conventional* stage of development. We need more *creative maladjustment*!

Some 800 years ago, Hafiz compared our journey to a desert caravan. Our challenge was to discern what was real from mirage, difficult in a desert. Trying to find what is true and essential in organization is daunting as well. Hafiz' perspective:

It has not rained light for many days, The wells in most eyes look Drought-stricken. Thus friends are not easy to find In this barren Place. Where most everyone has become ill From guarding Nothing. On this primal caravan Careers and cities can appear real in this Intense Desert heat, But I say to my close ones, Don't get lost in them, It has not rained light there for days. Most everyone is diseased From making love to Nothing.

It is marvelously easy it is to lose our way. I re-learned something the hard way last year: when I am weary and exhausted, stressed from an overwhelming set of priorities or concerned that I may not measure up to the demands, my brain doesn't work well. I see things that are not there; I make up stories and treat the imaginary as real. I worry about things I cannot control and battle enemies that appear to be *out there* but are really *in here.* I lose the ability to clearly tell the difference. The heat of my energy-demanding life, the torrid landscape of uncertainty, complexity, and endless demands on my time and calendar all take an invisible and cumulative toll. I feel thirsty for light.

To find our way as leaders, I recommend these *seven actions*:

Action 1: Become strategically unavailable. Build in time to breathe deeply, cool down, and travel more lightly. *Drought-stricken eyes* are caused by an endless diet of problems and things gone awry—problems that we take personally. I will find and pursue pos-

sibilities that awaken others and me so that we each have a more enjoyable and meaningful trip. I will learn how to *rain light*—a vital leadership competency.

In an illusionary world, where a mirage can make real what is not, we may need resiliency and resolve to reach our destination. In the interim, we live primarily with uncertainty and with what David Whyte calls *"…The bitter unwanted passion of our sure defeat."* Under this pressure we lapse into categorizing others around us friend or foe, ally or enemy. These are not useful categories except on a wartime battlefield. Yet I have seen colleagues and I fell into this mindset: If you see the world differently than we do, you are not one of *us*—you are with *them." Friends are hard to find in this barren place.*

When complexity, pace of change and scarce resources escalate, the workplace can become spiritually and emotionally barren. Sound bites pass as dialogue, and heaving opinions back and forth passes for learning from one another. We want to be *right* more than *effective*. We feel justified in excluding those who seem different. We have simply adjusted to the norm of separation, to the mirage of separate and competing interests. We have fallen into the bleak, unawakened landscape of believing that *to get what I want you must lose something*. Each time I succeed in taking from you, I become more vulnerable. I know you could do the same to me, and so I make my defenses stronger.

Action 2: Cultivate friendships and new partnerships with others who may appear to see their world differently than you do but who are undoubtedly cut from the same cloth (*friends are hard to find in this barren place*). I have purposed to find ways to connect with others I see as different. I have spent too many days as a lone sentinel standing over my organization, my field of study, my professional discipline, and other things I mistook for me. I see that truth when I mistake my strategies, my politics, my ideology, my religion, my nation, my organization for myself, I then lose the ability to live with compassion. I become just one more man, defending one more mirage and fighting one more senseless battle. It is enough. When I spend time and energy defending my position, my opinion, my career, my technical expertise, my functional area—virtually anything that has the word *my* in front of it—I'm likely guarding nothing (*most everyone has become ill from guarding nothing).*

Guarding is essentially a reactive action: I must be vigilant from a threat that always emerges *out there* and be ready to defend. Even when my action appears strong and tough, it is motivated by a desire

to guard or defend (myself and what I mistake to be real). Then my action is compensatory at best. I am playing to not lose. It is impossible to move into elite level work from such a defensive stance.

Action 3: Watch closely what you defend and guard and get curious when and why you defend it. Curiosity is often better than judgment. I have purposed to defend much less this year. I desire that my action be *purpose-driven*—moving others and me toward outcomes that matter to us all—and no longer in protecting and guarding my illusory and false sense of self. I will watch closely how often I reference *me* and *my,* seeing these indicators as a relevant set of metrics in a world that claims to like metrics.

Consider the real possibility that core systems and structures in our lives may be mirages *(careers and cities can appear real in this intense desert heat).* When you are under heat, pay careful attention to what you think you see. Mirages abound! Careers, cities, businesses appear and appear real when you're in them! There are, after all, traffic lights, buildings, and noise. There are customers, incentive plans, and performance evaluations, pay grades, promotions, and turnover. I hope the last item does not include me! It is only in perspective, gained by stepping back and breathing, that I can entertain the possibility that much of what I have invested my life energy in is temporary, impermanent, and likely to be gone soon. If it was ever there at all! But this is a perspective gained from being *outside the mirage looking at it, not from within it.*

Action 4: Remember: things are not as they appear. I purpose to act as if all things are malleable. I see what I am prepared to see. Problems or opportunities? My call and yours. Nothing is as fixed, dense and "given" as I think it is. Neither my customers' behavior and circumstances nor my own behavior and circumstances are as dense as I once thought. There is hope. Then again, I might be a mirage myself.

From his desert experiences Hafiz implies there is an abiding spiritual reality behind things, an un-changing truth behind the shimmering mirage *(I say to my close ones, 'Don't get lost in them').* No prayer beads, wailing, or sacrifice are required—just curiosity. The underlying *Essence* isn't easy to find and doesn't announce itself with lights and flags waving. Yet, asking, *What's really going on here?* seems to invite its response. Learn to bring *meaning making* power into your conversation with others. This will at times feel uncomfortable and awkward, and require vulnerability and courage. In misunderstandings where tensions get triggered, don't get lost in meaningless positions and exaggerated arguments. Why defend gravity?

Action 5: Find your own way of pursuing and describing the essence of the issues you face. Use your intuition or your gut to discern the small voice or gentle hand on the small of your back saying, "Don't get lost in them." I have purposed to listen for the open secret hidden in plain sight, amid conversations with those I live and work with. I've tasted a different kind of connection with others and have grown weary of settling for something less. Plus, *drought stricken eyes* don't look cool.

The complexity, pace, and pressure of the workplace require a high level of emotional and behavioral resiliency. We have to hang in with each other for the long haul caravan. As leaders, we have to speak into the heart of others in new ways. We appeal to *drought-stricken eyes* with our vulnerability and openness to new learning, our courage to share our struggles, uncertainties, and concerns, even

as we pursue outcomes that are important but seem impossible. As we take others aside and share what we know with them (instead of using them as order takers), we implicitly call out and speak to the inherent brilliance of others as we see it.

Action 6: Expand your skill set by learning how to appeal to the mind, hands, and heart of those you work with. Most of us appeal only to the mind: we want to be seen as *relevant, rational*, and *right* (the new 3 Rs). We speak in declarative statements that reveal our thinking and position. If we are with each other long enough, we can predict one another's viewpoints before we speak. Put down the spreadsheet or cash flow analysis and look out. I have laid mine aside too. I'll meet you in a different conversation.

Leadership is not primarily a rational discipline. Done well, it awakens passions and emotions. Done at a high level, leadership combines elements of inward and outward strength, power, authority, touch, vulnerability, sensitivity, imagination, connection, intuitive knowing, and risky conversation. Leadership is sensual, love-making of a highest order—devotion not just to good work and purposeful achievement but also to *inevitable work, that which we came into life to do and to that Essential part of us that calls us to it*. It is only in this context that we can see more clearly how easy it is to *become diseased from making love with nothing*. A look at the headlines confirms how easily we can be duped into settling for something, or someone, less.

Action 7: Love what is real. Imagine the CNN headlines: *American health care costs skyrocket—Defending and making love with nothing reach epidemic levels in the workplace!* I have purposed to follow the thread of the *Essential* as it seeks expression in my life and work. I do not want to fall prey to fighting small battles over nothing and finding when I win I become smaller. I want to be decisively defeated by what is *Essential*. I will do my best to ask: What matters most here? What seems to want to happen here? What truth lies behind and fuels the frustration I see in others and myself?

May you see the inherent beauty in and come to trust your own *maladjustment*. We are not supposed to *adjust* to inequity, injustice, mediocrity, and deception. What things are you are not supposed to adjust to this year? Join the *creatively maladjusted* community of leaders and those who work with them. We are a small but deceptively powerful group caravanning through a world in dire need of magic! **LE**

Dan Holden is founder and president of Dan Holden & Assoc., executive coach, consultant, minister and teacher, speaker and author, senior consultant with The Leadership Circle and The Full Circle Group. Email danholden@verizon.net.

Five Leadership Qualities

All great executives must have these.

By Mark V. Hurd

For reasons that aren't clear to me, we tend to overcomplicate the notion of leadership—what it is, why it matters, and how it manifests itself. I'm not saying it's a simple concept to master—quite the contrary. We see evidence around us daily: in business, politics, sports and other endeavors. It's not easy to find effective leaders who build an enduring record of success.

In my career, and with the great executives on my team now, I try to keep the leadership formula simple. I find that efforts to add more layers to the definition of *leadership* can be distracting, even harmful.

> **The best way to be a leader, and to shape high-potentials into the leaders of tomorrow, is to focus on five abilities:**

1. Getting the strategy right. As the pace of change accelerates and as consumer tastes and needs shift faster and more dramatically, do you have a sustainable strategy for product development, customer engagement and employee engagement that lets you keep pace? Or are you always playing catch-up with competitors, always struggling to find new sources of revenue, and seeing market share taken by competitors that are far more in tune with customers, opportunities, and structural trends? I am a huge believer in brilliant, razor-sharp operations and execution—but unless those qualities are applied to a world-class strategy, your ability to compete and win and grow will diminish.

2. Executing the strategy. Some consultants are fond of saying that "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." That conclusion misses the point: if the strategy's right but the company can't execute it, the problem isn't the culture—it's weak or incomplete leadership. That's why I describe my leadership formula as simple—not easy: leaders need to set the right strategy and drive operational excellence that brings the strategy alive with dynamic new products, sales teams that are highly intelligent and engaging, and brilliant new talent that sees the company as a terrific destination.

Operations aren't just supply chains and automated systems—they are the optimization of people and process across the organization—front office, back office, product development, finance, engineering, customer service, sales, etc.—that allow them to work with the shared purpose of delighting customers, winning new business, creating fantastic new products, and identifying and exploiting opportunities ahead of competitors.

3. Putting the right people in place. I know, that sounds simplistic. But again, the margin for error in today's always-on business world is shrinking rapidly—and in spite of the fantastic applications and systems available today, brilliant technology in the service of sub-par managers will yield nothing but sub-par results. Leaders today need to master this discipline: after formulating and communicating the right strategy, and optimizing operations to execute that strategy, leaders then must build management teams that understand the big picture, know how their teams must engage inside and outside the company to deliver maximum value, and stay laser-focused on making that strategy come fully alive for customers and prospects.

4. Managing dual priorities that others see as conflicting (business isn't an "either/or" world). We all get asked: "Are we more concerned with *long-term vision* or *short-term execution*?" Managers may seek to pick one or the other, but leaders instinctively know that the answer is *Both*! When asked if employees should focus on *cost and efficiency* or *growth and innovation*, leaders instinctively answer *Yes*! Another variation is, "Is our primary focus *new products* or *new revenue*?" Again, the answer must be *both.* Leaders must then build teams that can achieve both outcomes.

5. Keeping everyone focused on the big things that matter most. FedEx CEO Fred Smith once said: "In business, the *big thing* is making sure the big thing *stays* the big thing." To me, the *Big Thing* consists of: 1) set the right strategy; 2) harness operational excellence to bring that strategy alive; and 3) pick the right people to drive relentless execution. Distractions abound: the temptation to get caught up in *important* but *non-essential* discussions and projects; the tendency to fall back on what you're comfortable with rather than what needs to be done; and the dangerous attraction of shiny new toys and trends. So, a second key supporting attribute is focus: *The big thing is to make sure the big thing stays the big thing.*

Leaders should avoid overcomplicating how they define and deliver leadership. Some people say leadership has to encompass qualities like passion, integrity, vision, energy, and commitment. Those are all wonderful attributes, and there's nothing wrong with a CEO embracing them. But the deeper question is this: what does *passion* mean in terms of setting a strategy, or driving world-class execution? If a leader is fiery and high-energy passionate but can't define a breakthrough strategy, how valuable is that passion? If a candidate for a top position has integrity but can't select great people and put them in the right positions, how does that personal integrity make her or him a better leader?

That's the real challenge of leadership—the ability to push aside anything that's not directly tied to setting a great strategy, executing upon it brilliantly, and putting terrific people in the right positions. Those top three qualities are challenging enough. **LE**

Mark V. Hurd is President at Oracle.

Learning Agility

It's a trait of true leaders.

By Vicki Swisher

As jobs become more complex, how will you know what to do, what's expected of you now and in the future?

As we look over the global landscape, we see that *the era of job stability and predictability is over*. The *new norm* includes the need to acquire new skills, all the time.

Because of workforce demographics, junior executives are moving into leadership roles faster and earlier. Many lack enough time on the job to build complex skills like strategy and collaboration. This skill gap becomes evident in leadership roles. And there's no sign of the gap closing. In your role, you'll likely face new situations, assignments, or challenges that could stump you if you're not prepared.

So how do you fill the gap and tackle unfamiliar situations that come your way? By *learning from your experiences*. By reflecting and harvesting lessons from each experience. By making sense of them and distilling them to principles. When you are faced with tough situations, those lessons manifest as varied approaches, ideas, solutions, techniques—a treasure trove of options to choose from, depending on the challenge.

Learning Agility is the ability to learn from experience in a consistent, systematic way and then apply that learning in new situations. This refers to a set of behaviors and preferences—both in how you go about our work and the choices you make. You can detect *Learning Agility* behaviors, and develop them.

What Does Learning Agility Look Like?

Sir *Richard Branson*, Founder of Virgin Group, says: "My biggest motivation? Just to keep challenging myself. I see life almost like one long university education that I never had—every day I'm learning something new."

From the early days of his storied life and career, Branson has been on a quest—to learn new things, different things, things that challenge him. His entrepreneurial career path has been the opposite of linear. Virgin was initially born from an alternative music magazine, but from there the company, driven by Branson's curiosity and zeal to take on the unfamiliar, has followed a growth course that is anything but ordinary—from a recording company, to retail music stores, and then a leap to airlines, railway, telecommunications, banking, and even space travel.

Branson's decision to start Virgin Atlantic Airways illustrates his drive to explore, experiment, and "create new things." Virgin Atlantic was not conceived from an intense vetting process of poring over business scenarios and financial models, but from a burst of inspiration from Branson. After a frustrating incident when he waited on hold for hours for an airline customer service rep to help him, Branson decided he could do a better job of this himself. Of all the challenges he had taken on, this was arguably the riskiest and farthest from his comfort zone. But he did it. As with all his ventures, there were stumbles, setbacks, and failed attempts, but today Virgin Airlines is a force to be reckoned with in the airline industry.

An avid reader, Branson considers his education to be "an education of life." By his own account, he's "gotten involved with a lot of different things" which has allowed him to expand his perspective, stretch himself, and grow. Branson continues to amass lessons from his experiences that equip him as he continues his journey. No one today is surprised when Branson announces his latest venture or idea—he's made a brand out of pushing himself and Virgin to new realities.

Qualities such as learning something new, pushing himself, looking at things differently, deliberately seeking the unfamiliar, and figuring out how to get things done when the challenge is new are found in *agile learners*. In a complex world, agility as a learner can make a big difference. Knowing or figuring out what to do in new, challenging situations when you don't, at first, know what to do can help equip you for the change and complexity that is likely to come your way in your career and in life.

Today, it's unlikely that you can walk into a job, role, or assignment knowing it all. Your past accomplishments still matter, but they won't be enough. Going-forward success won't be about looking in the rear view mirror—it will depend on how effectively you can manage, adapt and perform when confronted with unforeseen circumstances, dilemmas, crises, and complex problems.

Learning Agility has emerged as the most valid and reliable predictor of high potential in leaders (more important, even than IQ, emotional intelligence, or education). Why? People who are learning agile more readily learn new skills and behaviors and carry forward that learning to perform successfully in a diverse mix of situations. Only 15 percent of global workers are highly agile learners, so securing this talent for leadership roles is an important strategic differentiator. In fact, close to 25% of the *Fortune* 100 and 50 of the *Fortune* 500 use Learning Agility as a means to identify leadership potential in candidates. Because it's a predictor of future executive success, top universities and business schools have also started using LA in their curriculum.

People high in Learning Agility are recognized as having the most potential for advancement, they get promoted faster and more often than their peers, advance closest to the top, and achieve greater success after promotion. In fact, Learning Agility predicts potential in employees at a rate 18 times greater than looking at past performance alone.

The success of leaders depends on their interest in seeking out new, diverse, and challenging experiences; drawing lessons from those experiences; and applying those lessons and principles to their next challenge. Executives tend to trip up when they focus on doing more of the same, relying too much on past experiences, and defaulting to their favorite solutions. At the extreme, derailed executives appear to quit learning new things altogether. As a result, they don't make transitions to new and different jobs effectively or adapt quickly to the unfamiliar. They tend to rely on what got them to where they are, becoming victimized by past success. Faced with new demands, they get stuck, underestimate the newness of the demands and, instead, assume the new demands are just another version of what they've done before.

This doesn't mean you should discount your experience, or abandon what's worked for you before. You should both honor your experiences and retain a healthy dose of skepticism about them. When you're faced with a new or tough problem or issue that needs solving, pause before defaulting to what's been the tried-and-true path for you in the past. If the solution or course of action feels comfortable—that's a red

flag. If it seems like a winner on the surface—that's another red flag. *Your favored solutions have a shelf life*. You are bound to encounter new contexts, different people, and unfamiliar problems. And, eventually, you'll come up against a situation where your favored solutions or skills won't get the job done. Learning Agility provides you with an insurance policy to thrive in an uncertain future.

Agile learning is different from traditional learning in many ways. *Traditional Learning* relies on IQ, grades, academic marks, GPA, class rank, scores on standardized tests, functional/technical skills, verbal skills, data crunching, analytical skills, and straightforward problem solving. *Agile learners* are quick thinkers who take initiative, are curious—always asking why and how—make fresh connections, acquire and use rules and principles, are broad thinkers, and know personal strengths and weaknesses.

Learning Agility is more than intelligence or being *book smart*. Learning new job skills and technical knowledge is different from learning new personal behaviors or ways of viewing events and problems. Street smarts or simply learning from life experience is different from how intelligent you are (as measured by IQ tests, grades,

or technical knowledge).

Both traditional and agile learning are important—both are needed for success. However, too much emphasis on *traditional learning* can be risky.

Learning Agility comes into play with transitions—from the known to the unknown. When you face a novel, unfamiliar situation, your existing routines and behaviors may be inadequate. Learning Agility gives you the flexibility to learn new ways of coping with unforeseen problems and opportunities. Those who are *highly learning agile* gain their lessons closer to the event or interaction itself. Not because they are smarter (from an IQ sense), but because they have amassed more learning from past experiences which helps them figure out what to do when they don't know what to do. **LE**

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Creating Agile Organizations

Role of learning and performance management.

By Josh Bersin   🖱 Interactive

The word *agility* is on the lips of leaders worldwide as they try to increase their ability to anticipate change and respond efficiently and effectively. However, many HR executives focus on inserting agility into existing HR processes. Creating the Agile Organization turns its focus on agility itself and asks the question: If agility is the goal, which HR processes should leaders focus on changing first to enable

it? The answer: learning and performance management.

Agile organizations have three traits: 1) rapid decision-making and execution; 3) a high-performance culture; and 3) the ability to access the right information at the right time. Unfortunately, these are not common traits. Slow decision-making, siloed information, and conflicting departmental goals/priorities represent barriers to agility.

While these issues are significant, they are also superficial. Leaders face deeper, challenges as they try to become more agile—as they move from a highly structured, *safe* approach to one that is les structured and perceived as more risky. Many elements go into enabling employees and leaders to behave in a more agile fashion—and many of these elements are outside the influence of HR. To that end, HR should first establish a strong collaboration with senior leaders focused on evolving the organization to a more agile model before changing processes. Without this agreement, efforts by HR to increase agility are likely to be futile. Assuming HR has this agreement, the question becomes, "Where should HR focus its efforts?" Two levers of talent management are at the core of enabling agile behaviors: learning and performance management. Unfortunately, these are not traits commonly held in organizations. Slow decision-making, siloed information, and conflicting goals and priorities of different departments represent barriers to agility.

An agile approach enables businesses to compete and deliver more effectively. Agility is not only for start-ups—even mature companies can shed siloed management approaches and become more agile. And HR leaders can make a substantial contribution to increase their organization's agility. **LE**

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Change Methodologies

Why even the proven ones often fail.

Interactive

By Tom Somodi

We are influenced by solution providers and consultants of change methodologies who convince us that if we want to obtain a desired change, all they need to do is *execute this, do that* or *buy into this method.* In the heat of the moment of trying to determine a solution to obtain a specific change, falling prey to such arguments can be easy and understandable. However, such claims may not be accurate for your given situation.

Change is not just something you obtain—it is something you experience continuously. From all the change at the subatomic level to the movement of the galaxies in the universe, change is constantly occurring around us. While all change does require the execution of some process, in reality, change is not an art but instead should be considered a science. All change follows a set of rules and principles just like any other science. More importantly, by understanding what these rules and principles are and how they work, we can use them to our advantage when attempting to obtain a change.

Environmental Override

One powerful change science principle is *Environmental Override (EO)*: *If the conditions in a given environment do not support the processes associated with a desired change, that change will not take place in that environment.* So, a process that works well and drives change in other environments does not guarantee that such a process will work in your. A change won't occur in your company unless all the conditions in your environment support all the requirements of that process. EO explains why a specific method/process can produce a desired change for company X but not for company Y—or why a specific diet works for Sam but not for Bill.

Over the years, countless change consultants have noted that most business operations are similar and that their proposed solutions will work in most situations where there is adequate commitment on the part of management or individual. In fact, they would advise eliminating uniqueness (follow best business practices) or they say, "don't worry—our solution is easily customizable and configurable."

Once again, on a global level such arguments make sense (for example, every manager or individual wants to be known for following best practices) and in some cases might even be an accurate assessment. However, management and individuals need to recognize that this is not always the case. The environment in which a change must take place is complex and has developed over time in some sort of integrated relationship. So, the conditions there might never support a given change solution. Also, even if the environment is modified to support the requirements of a given change solution, it might represent a complete revision of the organization with plus and minus ramifications.

For example, a particular business system used to obtain a specific change in an organization might require individuals that have specific skills. By using that same business system in a culture where individuals with that skill set are few can make such a system either inoperable or unacceptable from a cost perspective. Likewise, a diet that works for a healthy person might not work for an individual that has a particular health condition (note, that in this case the body is considered a unique environment).

Leveraging EO to Your Benefit

Many management groups are frustrated when a proven process fails to work, and many individuals are equally frustrated when a process that has worked for others, fails to work for them. By understanding the EO principle, you can address it head-on at the start of your change solution selection process in four ways: 1) clearly understand all of the requirements associated with that solution; 2) look at the conditions in the environment in which this solution will be executed and compare them to the above requirements; 3) realistically assess whether the conditions can be adjusted to support the requirements of the proposed solution; and 4) ensure everyone agrees with the operational, financial and cultural ramifications associated with adjusting the conditions to support the proposed solution. If this solution is for you, ensure all the ramifications associated with adjusting the conditions in your environment are realistically acceptable.

The effort involved in these exercises will vary depending upon the significance and complexity of the change. However, just being aware of the EO principle can help you avoid the pitfalls associated with assuming that if a process or methodology works for someone else, it should also work for you. **LE**

Tom Somodi is a speaker and expert on strategic change, reorganizations, acquisitions, and IPOs, and author of The Science of Change. Visit **www.changescienceinstitute.com**. Email **info@changescienceinstitute.com**.

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Want Innovation?

Create an adaptive culture.

By Eric J. Romero

Innovation is vital and when leadership creates an adaptive culture, it is much more likely to emerge. *Culture* is a set of values, beliefs, assumptions and norms that people have in common. The stronger the agreement to the values, beliefs and norms that constitute the culture, the stronger the relationship to behavior. Think about how national culture influences people to act in a particular way. No one has to tell Americans to be individualistic or Japanese to be group oriented—it comes naturally.

Corporate culture is similar, and in some cases, can have a stronger influence on behavior because people at work spend more time with each other and interact intensely. The outcomes of their behaviors are easier to observe, so peers and leaders can reinforce desirable behavior and discourage undesirable behavior. Culture leads to predictable behaviors and skills that can be a source of durable competitive advantage. However, culture can be a major asset or liability to an organization depending on whether or not the culture leads to desired behaviors.

Bureaucratic vs. Adaptive Culture

In an effort to control, managers tend to develop bureaucratic cultures by enacting inflexible policies and procedures. Bureaucracy is based on the assumption that control, predictability and certainty can be created by management. This is mostly nonsense, particularly in today's hyper-change environment where flexibility is essential.

Bureaucracy is the opposite of flexibility because it dictates what people should do. This is accomplished by rules, polices, and procedures. Many companies have policy manuals the size of telephone directories, which restrict what employees can think and do. Bureaucracy places unnecessary limits on thinking and actions of people confronting problems that require a new approach. Why think about the many things the policy manual says you cannot do? Over time, bureaucracy prevents new ideas from emerging or even being considered. The result is apathy and poor performance. Look at government, the ultimate bureaucracy, for evidence of how ineffective and inefficient bureaucracies can get.

To improve performance, avoid creating bureaucracy or dismantle preexisting ones. Some policies and rules are needed for repetitive tasks or when there is one best way to do something and the situation surrounding the task is unlikely to change (ex. surgery, handling cash, processing nuclear fuel, etc.). However, change in the form of new products from competitors, customer expectations, economic forces, etc., is common. When it comes to making decisions in a dynamic competitive environment where innovation is needed for competitive advantage, bureaucracy must be eliminated.

Since most organizations experience substantial change regularly, their cultures must be adaptive in order to foster flexible behaviors and attitudes in the workforce. For such organizations, strong leadership is imperative to ensure the development of an adaptive culture.

An adaptive culture values change as an opportunity for improvement and innovation. Personnel view change as exciting and challenging. They are not afraid of the uncertainties inherent with change. Leaders understand that most change cannot be prepared for and learn to embrace it. The fact they don't know the answer to a new problem is acceptable because it can be figured out. That is the value of embracing change, you can make it work for you. Compare this to the typical conventional competitor who is stuck on the idea that he needs to control and therefore never learns to think dynamically. Either he knows or he doesn't know the solution. When he does not know, he is like a deer in the headlights, stuck and unable to move while the vehicle races toward him. Unconventional leaders may not always know the solution to problems, but when they don't know, they figure it out. That is valuable thinking in a changing environment.

Leadership is needed to counter the managerial tendency to develop a bureaucratic culture and lead to an adaptive culture. Leaders must actively highlight the importance of being creative, flexible and unafraid of risk because this is what leads to innovation. To create an adaptive culture that innovates, leaders can do these nine things: 1) list the values, beliefs, assumptions and norms that you want to guide people's behavior in the culture; 2) hire, promote and recognize people who exhibit the culture; 3) encourage new ideas, perspectives, and approaches from everyone at all levels, not just the top; 4) encourage diversity in education, age, experience, and nationality and foster a culture where people express their ideas; 5) when responding to change, don't punish people who make mistakes or try new ideas that don't work (these are valuable sources of learning new ways to react to change); 6) focus initially on quantity of new ideas, not quality, to encourage the flow of ideas; 7) don't wait until you have full information to make a decision (by then it's usually too late for competitive advantage); 8) encourage and reward risk-taking to develop confidence in dealing with uncertainty and change; and 9) look for problems and areas of improvement—these can be a source of innovation.

10 Ways to Know If You're Innovating

Everyone thinks they're creative or innovative, but are they? Being *innovative* means thinking of ideas that are new and valuable. These can be a mix of new and old ideas. Not all creative ideas are innovative. For creative ideas to qualify as innovative, they must be useful and valuable: a money-saving process, a new product that sells, a training program that really transforms people.

Here are the top 10 ways to know if you're innovating: 1) you customize the tools you need to work; 2) you mix ideas from different fields; 3) you don't have to be right all the time; 4) you openly express what's on your mind; 5) you don't know how to do what you're doing; 7) you are a skeptic; 8) you have insufficient experience; 9) the establishment says you'll fail; 9) you are willing to risk failure; and 10) the answers you need aren't in books. **LE**

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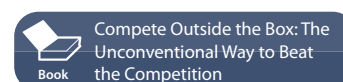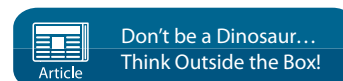
CEO Growing Pains

Follow these 10 rules for growth.

By David Olson

As an executive coach on business strategy, culture and leadership, my goal is always to see my client succeed. *I want to high-five them when they hit a homerun or score a touchdown.* I want them to have experiences that will lead them to achieve their goals: increased sales, better performance, healthy growth, and stronger culture to benefit all stakeholders.

By reflecting on my experience, I listed **10 Rules** a CEO should follow to survive growing pains. Every organization has seasons of growing pains, where markets are flat, consumers are nervous, customers become disloyal, and service processes breakdown. There is no escaping these seasons, so the key is to grow through them, not be flattened by them. There is no shortcut—perseverance and passion, along with these **10 rules**, will help you succeed:

1. Have a good partner. It's difficult for CEOs to sustain impacting change without a good partner by their side. Having a complementing partner increases your effectiveness. So, work with a good partner who thrives on being the best No. 2.

2. Become aware. Every monumental change, personally and corporately, stems from a moment of awareness. We should set our course on a constant journey of discovery.

3. Hire well. Faulty hires have a profound negative financial and directional impact. Be methodical, slow and purposeful when hiring your leadership team. Use the same due diligence you apply to a business acquisition when acquiring an executive leader.

4. Find leaders. Leaders are not *trained*—they are *cultivated*. Leadership is a deep intrinsic trait that can't be taught, only mined. Too much time and money is expended trying to make leaders out of non-leaders.

5. Focused execution. Most strategic initiatives fail because they are not executed properly. Organizations reorganize too quickly when an initiative falls short instead of regrouping, adjusting their approach, and re-executing well.

6. Good communication. Leaders rarely communicate effectively and often enough. In sports, botched plays often result from miscommunication. Teams win because they have an internal communication strategy. Organizations need one too.

7. Marketing matters. Although marketing is a haphazard practice, it is a critical strategic initiative—and the lack of it causes stunted growth. Marketing defines an organization's ideal customer and then establishes a multi-pronged strategy for connecting them to their products. Marketing is the epitome of delayed gratification.

8. Develop executors. Organizational leaders need to surround themselves with and invest in "company-minded executors." They are recognized by both their results and their character. These employees are the company's greatest asset.

9. People before profits. Profits are the means by which you take care of people. That does not mean people are exempt from being sacrificed for the sake of profits. However, organizations that practice an unhealthy appetite for profits will erode their culture and eventually their profits.

10. Teams win. Organizations don't win because they have good players—they win because they have a good team. Build a culture that feels like a team. This takes time, energy, and persistence, but pays real dividends.

Start practicing these 10 rules and grow through the pains. **LE**

David Olson is CEO/Co-Founder of Recognition PRO™ the employee recognition system built on the work of Dr. Bob Nelson, and President/Founder of Walton Consulting, and creator of the Culture Compass™ assessment tool. Call 800.537.4385, ext. 4
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Leadership in a VUCA World

Design strategic conversations to accelerate change.

By Lisa Kay Solomon and Chris Ertel

Today's leaders face a constantly shifting array of strategic challenges. Disruptive technologies can appear with little notice, reorganizing industries and markets. New competitors and customer demands are challenging incumbent business models. Skills and capabilities that worked in the past are often not ones we need to thrive in the future.

Since *vulnerability, uncertainty, complexity*, and *ambiguity* (VUCA) seem to be the new normal, how can leaders spark productive collaboration to issues in real time? **This is the most vital leadership question for our time!**
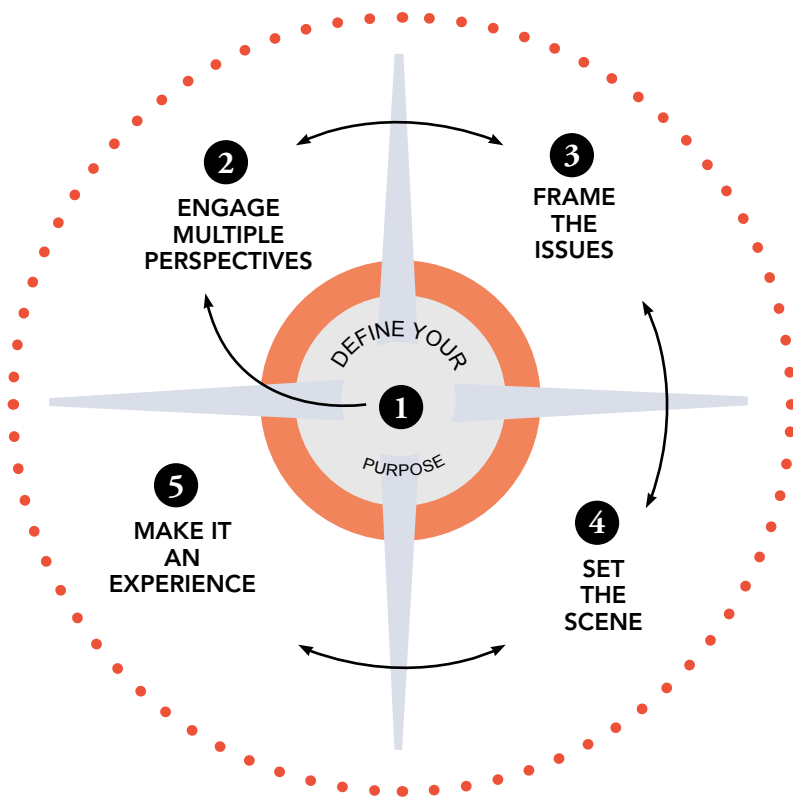
Gone are the days when financial forecasting, competitive analysis, or best-practice benchmarking alone can resolve the big strategic issues. If strategy was like a high-stakes chess game two decades ago, it's more like hockey today—fast, risky, and hard to follow. There's as much *improvisation* as planning involved. All leaders and managers are being hit with messy, open-ended, mission-critical challenges regularly.

Leaders today face a world-class dilemma: they need to make good strategic choices under uncertainty while engaging more people with different perspectives in the process—and do it all faster, too. To do this well, they need to put their people back into strategy—in a smarter way. Today, more than ever, strategy *is* the conversation.

Unfortunately, our traditional approaches to conversation and collaboration—data-drenched standard meetings or brainstorm sessions that circle back to nowhere—aren't up to the task. When was the last time you can recall a linear-agenda, slideshow-driven meeting that drove real progress against a tough strategic challenge?

Learning how to *design* these strategic conversations is a vital leadership skill, and yet it's rarely taught—not in business school, not in executive development programs, not anywhere. One inhibiting factor is the lack of public examples. Most strategic conversations happen behind closed doors, rendering them invisible to all but few participants. It's hard to get better at anything without seeing *what good looks like*.

In our work advising executives on strategy and innovation, we've learned that designing strategic conversations is a craft—not a crapshoot. It's a craft defined by a few core principles and key practices that can catapult a *been there, done that*" meeting into a gathering that propels an organization forward.

To turn your strategic conversations into experiences that ignite engagement and accelerate change, **practice these five steps**:

1. Clearly define your purpose. What do you need most from the strategic conversation with your team? Do you need to have a conversation that builds understanding on an issue? Do you need to generate clear strategic options on what to do next? Do you need to make a critical decision? For big, complex strategic issues, each question requires time and discussion that focuses on one of these three purposes. Avoid rushing to a conclusion on an open-ended topic—*go slow to go fast*—taking the time to make sure everyone understands the issues and what's at stake before making decisions.

2. Engage multiple perspectives. Leverage the diversity of ideas and opinions in your organization, and bring in equally valuable perspectives from *outsiders*—industry experts, customers, partners, and suppliers— when appropriate. Often, direct input from these experts can be more valuable than detailed analysis shared through static charts. Get the *dream team*—not the *must invite* team—in the room working on the issue.

3. Frame the issue. Take time to the right questions on the issue: spending 10 minutes on the right question trumps wasting 90 minutes on the wrong one. These conversations may need to be framed in the larger context of external trends, a dynamic competitive landscape, or changes in customer behaviors. Strategic frames work best when they are clear and memorable, and help participants connect the dots between different aspects of a complex challenge.

4. Set the scene. Don't have your most critical conversations in the default conference room Look for rooms with natural light and vertical white space to boost personal productivity and engagement. Small details can make a big difference. Are participants comfortable? Do they have the materials they need to stay attentive and alert (pens, paper, food)? Is there a whiteboard to capture new ideas? By minimizing distractions, you can maximize the productivity of the valuable time spent together.

5. Make it an experience. Design the session like an experience with a distinct beginning, middle, and end. While you can't predict exactly what will be said and how it will go, you can proactively prepare how the meeting will start; predict and manage potentially conflict-rich parts in the middle; and help guide where and how it will land at the end. Most memorable experiences involve some drama, but if you don't prepare for a solid ending in advance, you'll likely be surprised in a negative way.

To make progress against strategic challenges, you have to harness the best thinking and judgment of your best people—especially when they don't agree. The old saying is true: *nobody is as smart as all of us*. Plus, it's much harder to put strategic decisions into action if the people executing them aren't part of the conversation.

When leaders show the capacity to face a strategic challenge, they can drive change in powerful ways. Confidence and optimism become contagious. People spend more of their time thinking about and planning great things they can do next. That's why convening and designing great strategic conversations is the single most important leadership skill you can have in today's world. **LE**

Lisa Kay Solomon teaches innovation at the *MBA in Design Strategy* program at San Francisco's California College of the Arts and helps executive teams develop the vision, tools, and skills to design better futures. Chris Ertel designs strategic conversations as an executive adviser. They are coauthors of *Moments of Impact: How to Design Strategic Conversations that Accelerate Change* (Simon & Schuster).
Visit www.momentsofimpactbook.com.

Six Pillars of Leadership

Grounded leaders drive high performance.

👤 By Robert Rosen   🔘 Interactive

Our leadership model is broken. Leaders are poorly served by the prevailing paradigm on producing short-term results, often at high cost to ourselves and to our organizations. Many leaders today are ill-equipped to manage the challenges they face in a world changing faster than their ability to reinvent themselves. As they look into their organizations, there remains a growing gap between present and future leader.

A new model is emerging—a radically different approach to leadership that speaks to our better selves, while helping CEOs grapple with the relentless and complex demands of today's marketplace and improving company performance. Our research with has led us to conclude: ***It's who you are as a healthy leader that determines what you do—and, in turn, drives performance***.

The matter of *who you are* is determined by ***six dimensions of leadership health***:

1. Physical health which provides the energy and stamina needed to keep up with the relentless speed of change, as well as the ability to use mental and physical energy effectively and live a healthy life. PricewaterhouseCoopers Global Chairman Dennis Nally, for example, drives growth and change in his company by maintaining his physical energy with golf and yoga while balancing his work and personal lives.

2. Emotional health enables leaders to understand their strengths and shortcomings, to tap into positive feelings and jettison the negative ones, to be comfortable living with uncertainty and bounce back from adversity. When she was diagnosed with breast cancer at the time her company was stagnating, Linda Rabbitt, founder of Rand Construction in Washington, D.C., used her enhanced self-awareness to let go and value her relationships more deeply and better delegate responsibility to her employees, helping the business to break out of its rut and experience explosive growth.

3. Intellectual health involves a mental adroitness and deep curiosity, an ability to understand and accept contradictory or paradoxical thoughts and think clearly enough to innovate quickly and meet the demands of a complex marketplace and workplace. The CEO of military shipbuilder Huntington Ingalls Industries Mike Petters

tapped his deep curiosity, adaptive mindset, and commitment to life-long learning when his led the company, a spin-off of Northrop Grumman, in 2011 in a successful IPO.

4. Social health provides the capacity to be authentic while forging intimate ties with others and to build mutually rewarding relationships and help to nourish teams and communities. Ken Samet, president and CEO of Medstar Health, the largest health-care system in the Washington, DC region, boosted employee trust and commitment to his 2020 strategy, in large part, by being real, honest and authentic.

5. Vocational health is your ability to tap into a personal calling that reflects who you are and what you want to be, to fulfill your highest potential through personal mastery and to drive for achievement and success in a competitive world. Ted Mathis, CEO of New York Life, the largest mutual life insurance company in the United States, helped to change the firm's slow, hierarchical decision-making structure—and to weather the 2008 economic downturn—through personal mastery by challenging himself, learning from others and being thoroughly prepared to address the issues.

6. Spiritual health opens up the part of an individual that recognizes something more meaningful than personal needs. It helps leaders tackle the forces of globalization and avoid chasing small-minded aims. Klaus Kleinfeld, CEO of Alcoa, combines his German-bred passion for excellence with his commitment to social responsibility, applying those values to every facet of operations, from the work the company's foundation does, to ensuring the business's leaders are globally minded and socially committed.

Six Actions Healthy Leaders Take

Mastering the six dimensions of leadership health enables leaders to take the six actions necessary to lead today.

1. Tap into a higher purpose. Ben Noteboom, CEO of Randstad Holdings, a global staffing company, boosted revenues from $5 billion in 2003 to $22.8 billion today partly by hiring people who are "fundamentally motivated to be able to build a better company and a better world around a higher purpose" he says.

2. Forge a shared direction. Alan Mulally, who became CEO of Ford Motor Co. when the company was hemorrhaging money and shedding thousands of jobs, focused the organization around the One Ford One Direction plan and turned the firm around.

3. Unleash human potential. David Novak, CEO of Yum! Brands, relishes his role as teacher and mentor, instructing more than 4,000 people over 15 years in everything from problem-solving to step-change thinking.

4. Foster productive relationships. Sally Jewel, former CEO of

outdoor apparel and gear retailer REI and now Secretary of the Interior, formed deep personal connections with employees through town hall meetings in which she opened up the books, as well as regular "Let's talk" sessions.

5. Seize new opportunities. By creating a smart, growth-oriented culture, including making 26 acquisitions in 17 years, Kumar Birla, chairman of the Aditya Birla Group, (AGB) a global conglomerate producing everything from aluminum to cement, expanded the company from $2 billion in 1995 to $40 billion today—and is shooting for $60 billion by 2015.

6. Drive high performance. John Kealey, CEO of software company Decision Lens and former chief of satellite business iDirect Technologies, helped revenues at the latter firm soar 1,600 percent to over $120 million in five years by forging a culture encouraging teamwork and going the extra mile.

Dramatic Bottom-Line Results

The results have dramatic consequences for the bottom line. These leaders significantly outperform their less-healthy peers, according to our research.

In fact, through face-to-face interviews with hundreds of CEOs and the results of our 360 *Healthy Leaders Profile*, which measures leadership character and performance, we learned that *the higher the leadership health score, the better the performance metric* as rated by bosses, peers and staff. **Who you are drives what you do and that influences how you perform.**

Ultimately, leaders who master the six dimensions see the world clearly, think with an open mind, feel with positive emotions and act constructively and responsibly. As a result, they are not only personally more fulfilled, but also able to run healthier and more competitive, profitable companies. **LE**

Robert Rosen is an organizational psychologist, CEO of Healthy Companies Intl. and author of six books including the NYT bestseller *Grounded: How Leaders Stay Rooted in an Uncertain World.*
Visit **bobrosen.com**.

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Brainstorming

## *Here are the five real rules.*

By Stephen Van Valin

I once made the mistake of leading a brainstorming session without reminding the group of the rules. I assumed they knew, since they were senior leaders. Surely they would know how to brainstorm effectively right? Wrong—it was a train wreck.

Within five minutes, an argument broke out as to why an idea wouldn't work. Then, people piggybacked on the negativity, citing all things wrong in the business. There was no way to get the brainstorm back on track. After that experience, I promised myself that I'd never lead a brainstorm again without reviewing the rules.

To excel at brainstorming, you need to master the fundamentals and then execute them consistently well. The basic rules are liberating to the creative process, not constraining. Once you master them, you'll generate more great ideas and creativity.

Here are the top *5 essential rules* of Brainstorming:
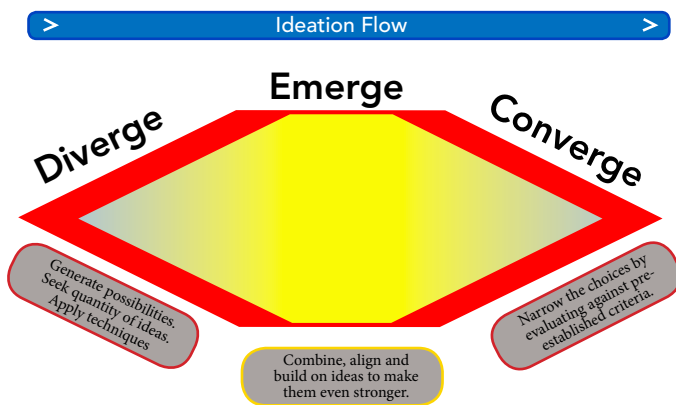
Rule 1: Suspend Judgment: Treat every idea as a good idea. We tend to voice opinions and criticisms almost immediately and negatively evaluate things we don't fully understand, especially if it looks or sounds different. Most people dislike change, and ideas change things. The best way to suspend judgment is to eliminate language that is toxic to new ideas. *Toxic phrases* include: "It's not in the budget," "We tried that before," "That will never work," "Not the right timing," "Legal will never approve it," and "Let's form a committee to look into it". To eliminate such phrases, try giving a Nerf ball to everyone and invite them to bop violators who judge with toxic phrases.

Judgment is toxic to brainstorming for two reasons: *1) judgment slows the process down*—rather than thinking of new ideas, all energy is applied to whether the idea is viable (a black hole); and *2) Judgment intimidates*. People stop sharing ideas for fear they might be shot down right away. Create a culture that encourages ideas, even if they aren't *fully baked* initially. Generate better ideas by not judging them prematurely. Stay in the *Divergent* thinking stage—don't jump ahead to the *Converging* stage where ideas are judged and prioritized. Judgment must come later with its own purposeful focus.

If you *Suspend Judgment* and treat every idea as a good idea in the *Diverge* stage, you'll be more energized to generate ideas, and encourage participation from everyone. When people take more risks, great ideas surface and become difference makers.

Rule 2: Be curious, not critical: say, "Yes, and…" Not, "Yes, but…" Curiosity is all about being open, inquisitive, and interested. It's an eagerness to want to know more, a desire to understand and learn the meaning. Curiosity unlocks the potential in our mind to respond positively to ideas and improve upon them.

To respond with curiosity more often, try these three tips: 1) *Say, "Yes, and…" NOT, "Yes, but…"* Think "yes and…" to the last line uttered and go with it. This enables you to expand upon the line using the momentum of the creative flow. 2) *Be aware of the questions you ask.* Do they open possibilities or shut things down? What questions might you ask to understand others and learn more about their thinking? You might say: "Can you tell me more?" "What does that look like? "How might it work?" 3) *Pause before responding.* Take a *chill pill* before saying anything. Then, think of what is *positive* or *interesting* about the idea. This puts you in curiosity-mode first. To cultivate curiosity, listen to the words you use in response to others, and be aware of your thinking.

Rule 3: Think it… Say it… Write it: No idea is too outrageous—let it fly and capture them all. The light bulb is the universal symbol for coming up with an idea because it illustrates the quintessential moment when an idea "flashes" in our head. Ideas illuminate something new, different and exciting. It's often described as a WOW or brilliant moment. Creative people recognize and embrace their light-bulb moments. They seek purposeful ways to turn on the switch, and are confident to tell people what they see once the light is on. They think it, *and* say it, plus they write it all down.

To enlighten a brainstorm, don't pull back, self-judge, or think the idea through first before saying it out loud. Flex your creative muscles and take more risks to *say it* even if it isn't perfected or seems outrageous. Extroverts have such an easy time *thinking it… and saying it*, that they sometimes dominate the brainstorm. To give others a chance to participate, you might go around-the-room for idea sharing, or toss a ball to random people for shout-outs. When you do *say it,* be short and sweet like billboards and tweets. Avoid overselling—trying to convince people your idea is great. The act of *Writing it* sends a message to everyone that their idea matters—and allows everyone to see what is generated. Visually represent the ideas so you can later build, sort, and evaluate them.

Rule 4: Quantity creates Quality: *Go for the 2nd right answer and beyond*. Quantity gives you a better choice (quality). It's tempting to take the first good idea and run with it. But to achieve something remarkable, you need to seek the second right answer and beyond. Get many good ideas, and then keep the best ones. To generate *quantity and quality*, try these four methods: 1) challenge each other to fill the flipchart with ideas full; 2) ask better (focused, yet flexible) questions. For example, "How might we increase sales in 4th quarter using social media?" Or, "What might we do to increase repeat purchases from our first-time customers?" 3) use creative constraints to drive more ideas. For example, "What might we do if the budget was no object?" Or, "What might we do if we had to deliver the idea in only 24 hours?" Or, "What could we do for free?" 4) borrow unique perspectives as stimuli: "What would scare the competition the most?" Or, "What would we *never* do?" Or, "How might Pixar approach this challenge?"

Or, "What is this problem like?" Create a metaphor and generate ideas from the perspective.

Rule 5: Piggyback on Ideas: Combine and build on ideas to create new possibilities. In a brainstorming session, piggyback on ideas to generate something remarkable. One effective way to produce great ideas is to combine and build on others to create new possibilities. Masters of brainstorming continually ask, "What if…?" as part of their dialogue, since these words reflect the attitude that unlocks possibilities. And the masters combine the *curiosity attitude* of "Yes, and" with the *possibility catalyst* of "What if…?" to piggyback on the ideas of others. Achieving this level requires listening with curiosity and a sense of optimism that sparks creative intuition. If you say, *Yes, and what if…?* out loud, you'll be amazed at the creative direction it will take you.

Be certain that your team knows and practices these five rules until it becomes second nature when problem solving together. It's the key to winning with ideas. I've seen how average ideas turn into a something remarkable by piggybacking on ideas. **LE**

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Brainstorming   Visit : what a great idea

Lead with Your Brand

It's now a management imperative.

By Denise Lee Yohn

Interactive

If you're investing time and money into branding strategies that aren't making a difference, you're not alone. Most leaders are frustrated by the lack of return they see on their marketing dollars. So, how are some companies enjoying rapid growth and success with minuscule marketing budgets? Why are companies like online retailer Zappos.com soaring past competitors that spend twice as much and more on advertising? What are these companies doing that many astute leaders are missing?

Build Brands Through Actions

Great brands consider their brands as verbs, not nouns. They don't use their brands simply as external images promoted through marketing and communications. Instead, they use their brands to shape the internal culture they cultivate, the core operations they design, and the customer experiences they deliver. It's who they are and what they do. This means that the stewards of the brand don't reside in the marketing department; they're at the highest levels of the organization. These leaders ensure their organization delivers the brand identity and core values through everything they do, every day, all day. They recognize that brands are built through actions, not advertising.

Zappos.com designed its organization around its brand's values. Value number one is "Deliver WOW through service." So the company requires every new employee, regardless of the position they will hold, to go through intensive customer service training – and then they'll pay anyone to *leave* if they don't embrace the company's values.

Zappos doesn't track customer call times and representatives don't earn commission. Instead, they're trained to devote as much time as they need to make sure every customer is satisfied. If a product is out of stock, representatives search competing web sites so they can tell the customer where he or she can purchase it. Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh explains why his company invests so much in customer service and so little in advertising saying, "The telephone is one of the best branding devices out there."

The company started as an online shoe store, but its founders defined its brand as "a service company that happens to sell shoes." With this brand identity, they created an operating model that has been flexible enough to incorporate a wide range of products, and today, in addition to footwear, Zappos offers apparel, accessories and sporting goods.

When the company was conceived, Hsieh and his colleagues never intended that it would sell only shoes. "We decided that we wanted to build our brand to be about the very best customer service and the very best customer experience," he said. "We believe that customer service shouldn't be just a department; it should be the entire company."

By shifting your concept of *brand* from noun to verb, you allow for constant evolution. When you think of your brand not as an identity but as an instrument that you can use to fuel, align, and guide everything your company does, you position your company for successful expansion.

Leaders who opt for *doing business as usual* are killing their companies. With developments in technology and communications and dramatic changes in the economy, old-style branding doesn't work well anymore. Meanwhile, brands are more important than ever. The frontrunners in this new *brand-as-business* world are the companies whose leaders recognize that businesses must be set up and operated according to the core values of their brands. They wouldn't dream of handing over the reins of their brand to their marketing department or an ad agency. For a business to be successful, leaders need to embrace the concept of operating the business based on its brand.

What Great Brands Do

In my book *What Great Brands Do*, I explore **seven principles** that are integral to building a great brand. Great brands: 1) *Start Inside*—cultivate a vibrant corporate culture around the brand; 2) *Avoid Selling Products*—develop superior emotional connections through products; 3) *Ignore Trends*—challenge and anticipate trends, rather than follow them; 4) *Don't Chase Customers*—accept that your brand is not for everyone; 5) Sweat the Small Stuff—overcome silos to align and unify all your customer experiences; 6) *Commit and Stay Committed*—sacrifice short-term profit to maintain brand integrity; 7) *Never Have to Give Back*—make social contributions by creating shared value.

What separates a great brand from a good one is how thoroughly the company incorporates these principles. Leaders of great brands

systematically and seamlessly integrate these principles to fortify brand strength and fuel business growth.

Think of it as a ***three-step approach*** that consists of cultivating your culture, planning your operations, and executing your plans—all with your brand as the driver.

Step 1: Culture. Your culture is the foundation for every aspect of the brand-as-business approach. Great brands start brand-building inside by cultivating a brand culture and mindset. This foundation supports every business operation from high-level strategies to small details.

Step 2: Planning. Principles 2, 3, and 4 help you to determine which business activities your brand should undertake and which ones to avoid. Use your brand as your guiding light for planning and making decisions that are congruent with the values and attributes of your brand culture. You forgo selling products in favor of developing emotional connections and relationships with your clients. You ignore trends because your decisions are being guided by your brand identity—not by fleeting and often competing external forces. You don't chase customers, because it's more profitable and sustainable to attract only those customers who resonate with your brand.

Step 3: Execution. Principles 5, 6, and 7 bring your culture and plans to ultimate fulfillment. You sweat the small stuff in every customer interaction because that's how you build brand equity. You make sure your execution remains focused and disciplined by committing and staying committed. You keep your attention on creating shared value for your stakeholders, your community, and your customers, instead of *giving back*.

Doing Brand as Business

The seven brand-building principles combine to create a system of doing brand as business—and that's where the real power lies. As a leader, you must use your brand to drive every aspect of your business and clearly articulate this practice to every employee.

Brand as business will only succeed if the leadership team fully embraces it. You can't delegate this vital mission to your marketing department or outside ad agency. To achieve an enterprise-wide approach, you must be in the driver's seat with your brand at all times. You must use your brand, not only to set direction, but also to orchestrate implementation across all functions, for all stakeholders. Nurture a culture that sets your company apart from others, provides value beyond any single service or product, and establishes a strong, loyal bond with your customers.

To be a great brand, do what great brands do—lead with your brand, and do brand as business. **LE**

Denise Lee Yohn inspires leaders how to operationalize their brands to grow their businesses. She is a brand-building expert, speaker, and author of <u>What Great Brands Do</u> (Jossey-Bass).
Visit **deniseleeyohn.com/bites/best-bites**.

Culture of Accountability

Start keeping core values and meeting goals.

By Julie Miller and Brian Bedford

As a leader, you like to think that you run a tight ship. But if you're honest with yourself, you know that you let a few things slide—a missed deadline here and there, a few white lies to clients, some cases of over-committing and under-delivering, and perhaps a tendency to talk over others in meetings.

None of these things have been deal-breakers—you seem to get away with it—and yet you know if you don't start holding yourself and your employees accountable for these *little things*, they'll lead to more damaging results.

Accountability has different meanings for different people. We define it as *a personal willingness to answer for the results of your behaviors and actions.*

Think about where you and your people drop the ball in terms of client relations, personal integrity, and interactions with coworkers. Do you answer for these lapses? You can post *core values* on a website and remind your employees about them via newsletters, but if you are not held accountable to these values, you'll just repeat wrong behaviors.

So, how can you inspire an accountability-based culture? You might think, *We've tried making accountability stick before—those initiatives just melt away. That's what will happen this time.* To create an accountability culture, you must get buy-in from everyone, weave accountability into the fabric of your organization, and make it a part of every aspect of your business.

Follow these seven steps:

1. Conduct a 2013 accountability review. Despite the accountability failures of the past, it's possible that no one thinks they're doing anything wrong. Maybe they've never been told that they need to change how they do things. So, start your accountability revolution with a meeting of the minds. Call your team together for an open discussion of company *core values* and *required behaviors* and where you've dropped the ball. Explain that no one will get in trouble for acknowledging their shortcomings or pointing out those of others. Ask people to share the negative effects of these behaviors on the business and explain that those negatives will only get worse with time. To encourage people to be honest, take responsibility for your transgressions. Explain that things will be done differently now. Gain consensus on what the *core values* and *key behaviors* need to be to support the strategies and goals—and emphasize that everyone, starting with the key leaders, will be held accountable for demonstrating them.

2. Hold an accountability boot camp early in the year. You and other leaders at your company can't simply decree an *accountability mandate* and then expect everyone to fall in line. You'll need to implement a *training and development plan* to help employees understand why accountability is important and what *accountable behavior* looks like. In these sessions, establish how their *accountability mindset and behaviors* will affect their pay and progression. Teach them how to provide *accountability feedback* to one another to develop a culture of accountability. For leaders, you'll need specialized training programs that explain what accountability looks like for them and what they can do to be accountability role models. Tailor training plans to meet your needs.

3. Start with a behavior statement. Everyone will be held responsible not only for the *results* of their work, but also for *how they do* their work—their rewards will depend on both. If your most experienced salesperson has great sales numbers but bullies the shipping department to rush his orders, or if you have an employee who clients love but who often misses internal targets, those behaviors must have consequences despite their successes in other areas. Develop *behavior statements* that clarify what you're looking for and answer the basic question of what you are trying to fix, implement, or eliminate.

Such statements are essential in international companies, since accountability might mean different things in different countries, languages, and cultures. For example, you might establish *behavior statements* such as: *Always do what you say you'll do. Always tell the truth. Bring issues up as you discover them.* And then make those clear through Dos and Don'ts. For example: *DO be open, honest, and truthful. DON'T make excuses.* Revisit these statements in performance reviews and discuss with employees how they are doing when it comes to meeting the accountability standards.

4. Regularly meet up and talk it out. Hold regular meetings with your team, recognize people who demonstrate accountability, and show where things went wrong and what could have been done better. Do this in a way that instructs rather than punishes. Use every available communication tool to emphasize why accountability is important: electronic signs, business reviews, one-on-one meetings, e-mails, posters, and more. When you reinforce the changes you want to see, you drive the value deep.

5. Don't promote accountability shirkers. Connect accountability to advancement. Give promotions and salary increases only to people who *demonstrate accountability*. When your employees do well, reward and promote them. If they don't do well, apply consequences. Ensure they understand that their performance will determine their success and progression. If you promote employees with accountability

problems into leadership positions, you will cultivate a culture of no accountability.

6. Hire accountable people. Spice up your interviews and weed out unaccountables by asking key questions. Instead of asking job candidates about their strengths and weaknesses, ask, "If I asked your boss how you demonstrated accountability, what example would he or she give?" Or say, "Share with me a time where you made a big mistake and how you handled it." If you're interviewing a candidate for a leadership position, you might say, "Summarize a difficult conversation you had with an employee who had failed to meet a commitment." Or, "Describe a situation in which you clearly held others accountable for their performance and it paid off. How did you do it and what was the outcome?" More companies are using *skill assessment tools* and *personality tests* to screen potential candidates, so why not add behavior-based questions to screen for accountability. Hiring people who are already accountable is a better, less costly option than trying to train them to be accountable.

7. Monitor your success and make adjustments as needed. Use goals and metrics to guide the business during the year. Use regular meetings to establish an accountability *drumbeat* to keep goals and metrics on track. Reviewing goals only at the end of the year and hoping for success will likely be futile.

When left unattended, the negative results that come from a lack of accountability will spread. Will your organization survive the plague? Maybe. But what will your company look like? Will it be a place where great people want to work? Will it provide great services or products to customers? When you commit to making accountability stick, you improve your chances of becoming a great company. **LE**

Julie Miller and **Brian Bedford** are partners in MillerBedford Executive Solutions, improving strategy, culture, and leadership—drawing on their experience in senior global leadership at Motorola. They are coauthors of *Culture Without Accountability—What's the Fix?* (Criffel). Visit **www.millerbedford.com**.

It's Lonely at the Top

Can you lead without feeling alone?

👤 By Larry Gard

🔴 Interactive

As a leader or owner you may find yourself misunderstood, avoided, or criticized by those who report to you. Be aware of *two psychological factors* that contribute to a gulf between you and your staff.

1. Personal history can cause others to put you at a distance. If you're in a leadership role, others tend to view you through the lens of their history—their previous, most formative, or most powerful experiences with authority figures will color their *expectations* of you, their *perceptions* of you, and their *interpretation* of your behavior. Some people will be unaware of this process, blind to the impact that their history has on their interactions with you. They fail to recognize that pivotal experiences with a parent, a teacher, or other authority figure has left them prone to misinterpreting their bosses. Whether aware of this or not, the more they view you based on their personal experience of authority, the more problematic your working relationship with them will be. By watching for this, you are in a better position to manage it and tailor your response.

While you can't change their past, you can be aware that it influences how your people see you. If you're puzzled by an employee's response to you, if it strikes you as distorted and unexpected, their personal history *may* be impacting the relationship with you. Try these four tips: 1. Remain consistent and offer to discuss the misinterpretation on their part as neutrally as you can. Start by saying, "I'd like to understand your reaction to my (email, remark). I want to make sure that I didn't come across in a way that was unintended." 2. Initiate the clarifying discussion, but share the responsibility for improving the relationship. Say, "It wasn't my intention to sound dismissive; perhaps we can both look at ourselves and think how my message took a wrong turn." 3. Don't get stuck trying to manage their feelings and prevent their distortions, since you are

then working harder than they are. Say, "I try to be thoughtful about how I say things, and I hope that you can give me the benefit of the doubt as you interpret them." 4. Make sure that the boundaries you've set are designed for a professional relationship, not a personal one. For example it's okay to be *friendly*, but don't become *overly familiar*. You can agree to keep certain information *confidential*, but you shouldn't become a *confidant*.

2. Implications of a leader's personality characteristics. Various personality characteristics can help leaders rise to the top, but some traits can also contribute to isolation. If you're too strong on these personality dimensions or if the people around you experience you as too strong, they won't engage with you on a high level.

For example, what you see as being *serious* might be experienced by others as *distant and detached, cold and aloof*. And the more remote you appear, the easier it is for people to apply their own interpretation of your behavior. *Assertive* behavior may be seen as *intimidating*. Analytic or *fact-based* behavior might be seen as *uncaring*. *Realistic* behavior may be seen as *unimaginative*. Your self-reliant behavior may be seen as *closed to others*. So, get feedback about whether or not you're over-relying on certain personality traits. Don't assume that you can recognize it in yourself. Consider engaging in a 360-degree survey process so that you can gather objective data about how others see you. By analogy, you can probably do an acceptable job of combing your hair while staring out the window, but chances are you'll achieve better results by using a mirror.

When you're at the top all eyes are on you. Unfortunately it can be difficult to serve in this role without feeling apart from everyone else. Whether or not you choose to lead from a pedestal, others may place you on one. Attending to these two psychological factors can help bridge the gap between you and your team. Working with an executive coach may also be useful. **LE**

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📄 5 ways in which coaching can lessen your sense of isolation

Development Plans

Take the groan out of IDPs.

By Beverly Kaye and Beverly Crowell

The idea of holding *Individual Development Plan* (IDP) discussions between managers and direct reports isn't new. These discussions were once held as part of the performance management process, or separated out. Often these conversations weren't taken seriously unless they were used to surface high-potential talent or weed out unsatisfactory workers.

The process was frequently ignored by most workers—the *massive middle*. In fact, **many managers and employees groan and grumble about the IDP process**. *Is it that time of the year again?* IDPs can seem like a huge waste of time.

Yet organizations that address the development of *all* employees gain a competitive advantage. Companies need their people to be more fully engaged, to bring their discretionary efforts to the job, and to support their leadership. By recommitting to the IDP process, all can benefit. It can boost performance of employees and prevent them from leaving. If you're not nurturing and developing your talent, and keeping them longer, you're losing vital knowledge and personnel, and that affects the bottom line.

Video

Three strategic focus areas can provide an engagement edge with the massive middle: career self-management for employees, complementary career coaching for managers, and a wider and deeper mentoring methodology push. Managers must be skilled to feel comfortable in the dialogue and that employees are skilled enough to take responsibility for their own satisfaction. When this dialogue is mandated, accountability will be shared.

Stakeholders' Commitment

IDP implementation requires a stronger commitment from all stakeholders. The organization must devise the systems that support the discussion and the accountability practice; the manager must be prepared to be the *support*; and the employee has to be proactive and jump in as the *spark*.

Typically few stakeholders receive the training and support necessary to make best use of the tools they have. As a result, unnecessary mistakes are made, and development discussions are often passed to HR. Manager involvement is critical to challenge employees, build relationships, align individual needs with organizational needs, and put employees on projects where they can best utilize their talents and skills. The development dialogue requires ongoing conversations between the manager and employee. Instead of waiting to have these conversations once a year when developing IDPs, managers can unleash the energy of their employees in a series of structured, powerful conversations during the year. For instance, with new hires you might open dialogue around six areas critical to new beginnings: relationships, passion, challenge, focus, balance, and intention. If you don't do this, you may find that six months later, those new hires might be gone, and *backfilling* only crowds recruiters' agendas and impedes other staffing demands.

When there is genuine support, when managers are held accountable for engagement efforts, and when employees buy in, great improvements in staffing are possible.

At the same time, employees must get *real* about their development goals. Organizations talk often about getting **SMART** by creating goals that are *Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic* and *Time-bound*. All well and good, but if development goals aren't **REAL SMART**, then the *spark* may be missing.

Ensure that all development goals are *REAL*:

Relevant: Will the results be aligned with where you want to go and where your organization is headed? How do you know?

Enticing: Does it really look good to you? Do you want it enough to make it happen? Do you smile when you think about achieving it? Why?

Achievable: Does it look like you can complete the actions that are required within a defined period of time? Is it a bit of a stretch but still within your means? What would your first step look like?

Leverageable: Does it serve multiple purposes? Are there ways to apply your hard work to other goals that you may have?

Turn IDPs into Ongoing Conversations

Today, employees are asking, "Can I see my future in your future?" They are not only asking the question as part of the IDP process, but sometimes every day. And while IDPs are important, development conversations cannot only be left to what some may feel are regularly scheduled but distasteful annual events. Instead, all stakeholders need to hone the habit of more frequent, ongoing conversations. Even when the annual conversation is done well, once a year is not frequent enough. Without help and encouragement, employees and managers alike put the plans away until next year's inspection.

So help them both hone a *development habit*. Ensure that career development is top of mind not just at IDP time, but all year round. Talk about it, help both sides find ways to weave development into the day-to-day fabric of the organization. Evaluate managers based upon the development of employees; back up their commitment to development with learning and training opportunities to build capacity; and put career development on every meeting agenda.

Development is not a solo performance. Organizations that embrace development, not just once a year, will see to it that managers are skilled to feel comfortable in the conversation and that employees are skilled to take responsibility for their own career. **LE**

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Leadership Lessons

Learn these from Ebenezer Scrooge.

By Pat Cormier

Leaders can easily lose perspective. When leaders develop a sense of entitlement, their actions expose a lack of perspective, and ultimately, bring about a loss of respect from their teams. I share an example of one such situation—one that could happen to you.

This timely story conveys a leadership lesson about *entitlement, belief,* and *perspective.* No, this isn't about Ebenezer Scrooge, but it is about *your beliefs*, operating below your personal radar, that affect your bottom line.

Entitlement. With the budget debacle in Washington, threat of sequestration and debate of healthcare reform, you can't go five minutes without hearing the term *entitlement.* Its definition lies in conflict. Webster defines *entitlement* as *1. **a right** to benefits specified especially by law or contract. 2. **a belief** that one is deserving of or entitled to certain privileges.* It holds a different meaning depending on which side of the coin you see yourself.

The hot button for me is the lack of clarity when it comes to the work we do. Entitlement cuts both ways. Often, on the part of senior executives, it is in reference to Millennials or employees in general feeling *entitled* to (fill in the blank). Interestingly, senior executives (or anyone else) seldom see this behavior in themselves. Herein lies the crux of the matter when it comes to entitlement—belief.

Belief. Our belief lies in our vision of reality — based largely on our experiences and interpretations. One senior executive of a newly merged company requested help filling out some open enrollment paperwork. He was shocked to learn that he had only two weeks vacation unless he purchased more time. The employee explained that this was the new policy resulting from the merger. The executive's incredulous response was, "Yes, but I didn't think it was for people at my level!" By definition we believe we are deserving. The implications are as important as what they convey. Your beliefs speak volumes about how you see the world. Someone looking at the same facts and circumstances could walk away believing something entirely different. We often lack appreciation for the message our beliefs convey—showing a lack of awareness, or caring, that others see the world so differently.

Perspective. You could draw several conclusions from this exchange, depending on your experiences. You might agree that, after working for many years and reaching a C-suite level, a senior executive is deserving of more vacation time. Equally, the hard-working employee, having tenure as well, could see this simply as arrogance on the part of the executive. Why should *he* get preferential treatment? Similar points of view could be drawn in regard to a senior executive not knowing the details of the benefit changes due to the merger he helped orchestrate. With beliefs, context matters, a lot. For example, I could tell you that the request for help filling out these forms came within hours of the end of the day of the open-enrollment deadline. The employee whose help was requested had seen their position eliminated due to the merger and their long-term fate was unknown. How do these additional details shape your interpretation and change your perspective?

Great leader carefully listen to and consider the perspectives of each person on the team—hence, people want to follow them. When initiating a new strategy, these leaders take the time to build urgency and get buy-in from each individual affected in a way that resonates from their point of view. Once everyone is on the same page, aligned and moving in the right direction, people begin to realize hidden beliefs that they've built over time. When left unaddressed, some beliefs—like *the accounting department is difficult to work with* or *the relationship with a business partner is tenuous*—can slow or stop the execution of the best strategies. By having more dialogue, providing context, challenging assumptions, asking questions, and listening—you can replace *interpretation* and *belief* with *mutual understanding* and *engagement.*

To get more from your team, start with a perspective shift. Consider carefully how you come across to those around you. Consider their perspective. Stand, walk, and run in their shoes for a moment. If you look closely, you might realize you are in a Scrooge/Cratchit dynamic with one or more of your employees. If you aren't paying attention, you might be a Scrooge—and find out the hard way. **LE**

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Managers or Leaders?

What's more important to your success?

By David Brookmire

Many companies aspire to develop a strong management team that can inspire and engage employees. Ideally, through their leadership efforts, they'll create a culture where employees feel invested in the company, are loyal to its mission, and motivated to help the team achieve—and exceed—its goals. So, what's needed to achieve high engagement: management *or* leadership? The answer is *both*.

Typically, mid-level supervisors are *managers* who are more focused on project management and execution. They are expected to manage their teams and functions to achieve short-term results. The emphasis is on execution of the strategy that originates at the highest levels. Companies must work hard and execute well to ensure consistent, high quality products and customer service that reflect their desired brand attributes.

As the managers become upper-level directors (and higher), they need to develop specific skills to become leaders and shift into a more visionary and strategic role, demonstrating the confidence, skills and behaviors that inspire others to follow their direction. At the VP or officer level, you should spend most of your time on leadership.

The key to success is not an *either/or* option. Organizations depend on *both* leaders and managers to maximize their victories. So, companies must develop the competencies in their managers *and* leaders to ensure their various needs are being met.

It helps to distinguish between management and leadership to see how the behaviors manifest. The chart showcases key competencies and key differences between managers and leaders in each area, including the leaders' focus on *outside-in* orientation, longer-term horizons, and motivating through transformational behaviors.

Competency Group	Management	Leadership
Thought Leadership	Analysis Reactive Short-term Decision-making Limited scope Technical know-how	Strategic agility Proactive Long-term Seasoned judgment Apply broad perspective Business acumen
Interpersonal/ Communications	Collaborate with people Relate based on their role Clear and concise communicator	Create emotional appeal Relate based on their reputation Strategic messaging
Personal Leadership	Transactional – if you do this for me you'll get rewarded, if not, punished Influencer	Transformational – getting people to want to change and leading change Inspire emotion and engagement
Team Leadership	Clear roles and responsibilities Conflict resolution Competent team leadership Hire and train talent	Establish goals Achieve alignment to direction Cross-boundary focus Build bench strength
Achieving Results	Goals are necessary Planning, organizing, delegating and controlling Short-term results	Goals are desired Seek operational excellence Establish accountability Long-term results Build organizational performance
Personal Characteristics	Low risk-taker Limit the choices Maintain practices Meet commitments	High risk-taker Outline possibilities Challenge status quo Inspire trust

How to Develop Leaders

Can transformational behaviors be taught? Can managers shift into leadership roles and become more inspirational? Yes, leaders can develop more inspirational behaviors by being more in tune with their culture and followers and then deploying behaviors that foster higher employee engagement. Ronald Riggio, professor at Claremont McKenna College, determined that leaders who are expressive, match their behaviors with the mood and audience characteristics, and are sensitive to others' needs are more charismatic. (Click here) Alex Pentland at MIT shows that with some work, leaders can develop these behaviors to create a stronger bond with their followers. And, in her book, *The Charisma Myth*, Olivia Fox Cabane outlines both internal states and external behaviors that increase charisma in leaders. (Click here)

Beyond cultivating charisma, leaders must understand the external and internal environments and ensure that the work produced meets marketplace needs and that their team is following the formula for execution in producing the products and services.

Companies known for producing great leaders develop a winning approach for selection, development and retention of leaders required to meet their goals. Their CEOs are actively involved in training efforts, have planned processes in place that identify and develop leaders, formal classroom and on-the-job teachings supplemented with feedback and coaching, and integrated talent management systems.

For example, *P&G* has consistently been recognized for their excellence in developing leaders over the past several decades. It starts at the top. CEO Bob McDonald gets involved in the selection and development of their leaders. He spends time recruiting, teaching and coaching for leadership. He expects his team of senior leaders to do the same, and this cascades into all management ranks. They also use on-the-job assignments, feedback, and coaching to help grow their leaders.

Another good example is *Caterpillar*'s LD programs that focus on LEAD, or *Leadership, Excellence, Accountability* and *Development*. It starts with an emerging leader program, which offers specific curriculum for up-and-coming individuals who have the potential to move into leadership roles. The company has LD programs at every level, from high potential individual contributors to the top executives. They are anchored in a model that distinguishes the critical competencies needed at different levels. They also have their senior executives actively participate, teaching other senior leaders in a specially designed university-based LD program. In another program, company VPs lead a session with division leaders to outline the business strategy and discuss how leadership is tied to execution of the strategy.

To maximize your successes, you need strong managers who excel at execution and oversee day-to-day efforts. You also need inspirational, visionary leaders who bring a big-picture perspective. It's not an *either/or* situation—*both* leaders *and* managers are necessary players on any winning team. **LE**

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Leadership Competency Models

Why many fall short and how to make them flourish.

By Jim Clemmer

Interactive

Most progressive organizations today are using leadership competency models (LCMs) to outline the key skills and behaviors they want to see in their managers and leaders. LCMs provide a structured framework for defining and developing behaviors that impact performance most.

And yet, LCMs often fall short for five reasons:

1. Competencies pulled out of thin air. We've all been guilty of pulling competencies out of thin air. In one case, we had 140 top leaders in an offsite retreat to identify and vote on their top 10 competencies. Descriptions of each one were crafted by a few leaders based on the blizzard of Post-It-Notes around each competency cluster. Some organizations shuffle, sift, and prioritize card decks listing generic competencies. What's missing is proof that these competencies and behaviors have the greatest impact on employee engagement, attraction and retention, customer service, quality, innovation, safety, productivity, sales, and profits. How do we know we have the right competencies?

2. It's a bird, It's a plane, It's SuperLeader! Many LCMs provide a series of behavioral descriptions clustered around 6 to 16 or more headings. What's implied is that the pathway to peak performance is improvement across dozens of skills and behaviors, but this pathway is overwhelming and unrealistic. At best, leadership development (LD) that's a mile wide and an inch deep moves a leader from good to a bit better. Often, motivation to develop and follow a *personal development plan* to become SuperLeader is discouraging and leads to little change.

3. One size fits all. Most LCMs weight all competencies and underlying behaviors equally. Some models layer the competencies across organizational levels starting with frontline staff, and moving up to managers and executives. This SuperLeader model doesn't account for vast variances in individual preferences across leaders or their widely differing functions. Each person is a unique mixture of strengths and weaknesses. We have work areas that play to our passions and turn us on and areas that are a real chore and turn us off. One-size-fits-all LCMs don't account for those differences.

blog — Is Your Culture Anchored in Strengths or Weaknesses?

Strengths-Based Leadership Development

4. The Way of the Weakness. We're largely unaware of how we equate improvement, development, and personal growth with finding and fixing weaknesses. Improving low marks is deeply so-

cialized in us. When leaders get a 360-feedback report from direct reports, peers, manager, and others, their natural instinct is to quickly skip past positive ratings and comments and look at "where I need to improve." Unless there's a fatal flaw needing immediate attention, this isn't wise. The best that might happen is the leader raises a few of his or her competencies from poor to average.

5. Here comes the judge. In the dark ages of medicine sick patients were often bled under the badly misguided belief that bloodletting released toxins ("humors") and restored the body's proper balance. This unscientific - and sometimes deadly - practice often left patients weaker and less able to fight off their illness. If a leader's raters know that the leader's boss will be seeing the assessment results they will change their ratings. And the entire process is transformed from development to evaluation. Now the conversation between boss and the rated leader generally moves toward performance bloodletting. After a cursory acknowledgement of strengths most bosses (often with poor coaching skills) will focus in on weaknesses and demand the leader address and improve these. It's little wonder many performance appraisals are approached with as much enthusiasm as a medieval doctor's house call.

6. Performance (Mis)Management Systems. Many HR departments and executives confuse *competencies* and *performance outcomes*. They use LCMs to try evaluating and holding managers and executives accountable for all of the competencies the dozens of behaviors describing each one. Effective PM holds people accountable for delivering results. These targets are *the what* and might include sales, margins, profits, new products/services, project implementation, production levels, service/quality levels, productivity rates, budget numbers, and the like. Well designed and well researched competency maps provide pathways for *the how* to reach these performance goals.

Differentiating Competencies

Focus on Results	Focus on Results	Character	Interpersonal Skills	Focus on Results
• Drivers for Results • Establishes Stretch Goals • Takes Initiative	• Develops Strategic Perspective • Champions Change • Connects the Group to the Outside world	• Displays High Integrity and Honesty	• Communicates Powerfully and Prolifically • Inspires and Motivates Other to High Performance • Builds Relationships • Develops Others • Collaboration and Teamwork	• Technical/Professional Expertise • Solves Problems and Analyzes Issues • Innovates • Practices Self-Development

Keys to Make LCMs Flourish

Here are five keys to making LCMs flourish:

1. What Really Matters: Correlate Competencies to Performance Outcomes. Effective leaders have a dramatic impact on morale, teamwork, engagement, innovation, customer satisfaction, quality, productivity, safety, sales, and profits. But which behaviors have the greatest impact? Zenger Folkman's research began with looking at survey responses from over 200,000 raters of more than 20,000 leaders. Each of the data sets represented different customized 360 surveys from a variety of organizations. They searched for the competencies that sharply delineated the top 10 percent from the bottom

10 percent of leaders by their performance outcomes. This search for the key leadership competencies identified 16 competencies in five clusters:

2. Don't try to do it all: Build three to five competencies from Good to Great. Extraordinary leaders rated at the 90th percentile deliver outstanding performance results that are 3 to 20 times higher than those at the 10th percentile. And top-performing leaders deliver results that are double or more than average or good leaders rated at the 50th or 60th percentile. Extraordinary leaders don't need to be *SuperLeaders* excelling at all competencies to perform at the 80th and 90th percentiles. Improving just three to five of sixteen competencies from good to great will do it. And it doesn't matter which competencies we choose. So we can pick those that are natural strengths, are most relevant to our job, and we're most energized about developing further.

3. Develop towering strengths to overshadow weaknesses. Think of the best leader you know personally. What were three to five of this leader's most profound strengths? Did he or she have any weaknesses or areas at which he or she did not excel? What kept those weaknesses for undermining his or her overall impact? Perfect leaders don't exist. Leaders who excel at the 90th percentile across all competencies are exceedingly rare. LD that comes across as the pursuit of perfection is de-motivating. LD that looks to magnify a smaller number of natural strengths that really make a difference is highly energizing. That's why rates of personal growth, leadership development, and improvement double.

4. Use competency models for building and developing. The purpose of a LCM is to help leaders be more effective**.** A *Strengths-Based Leadership Development System* built on a relevant and validated competency model is a roadmap to high performance. Like a GPS mapping device, the competency framework and 360-feedback assessment help leaders identify where they are now and which routes will take them to their next level. *Companion competency mapping* is a critical element in this approach. This guides leaders in using *strengths cross-training* to plot their improvement journey. The one exception to focusing on strengths is if a 360 assessment shows the leader he or she has a fatal flaw—a competency that is important to the leader's job and he or she is performing so poorly that others can't see past the glare of this gap to his or her strengths. When that's the case, the leader needs to focus all improvement energy here.

5. Evaluate performance results (The What) not competencies (The How). U.S. General George S. Patton delivered big results in WWII. Under his leadership his army advanced further, captured more enemy prisoners, and liberated more territory in less time than any army in history. Patton once articulated a key element in his performance management approach *Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity.* Effective PMS identify what to do. They set clear targets and measurement of success. An effective strengths-based leadership competency model helps people apply their ingenuity in playing to their passions and leveraging their natural strengths to meet organizational needs specific to their role. **LE**

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Excellent Leaders

They share common traits and actions.

By Scott Hamilton

From each experience in life, we can learn lessons and develop our leadership skills. For example, my education and experience in practicing psychotherapy, developing assessments and leading teams have taught me that people are most effective when they're engaged in the process and feel that they own part of the result. They appreciate sharing in the satisfaction of participating in the success of an activity, perhaps experiencing a well-designed, new product hitting the marketplace.

Everyone works best when directed in a manner consistent with their individual characteristics, enabling them to be themselves as much as possible while working. A good job fit based on their personality and other individual characteristics boosts their engagement. Since the characteristics of each individual tend to define the activities in which they'll be most comfortable and effective, understand their characteristics and learn to accommodate the various needs, and expectations of each team member.

Jim Collins describes several characteristics of CEOs who take their organizations from *Good to Great*. Here I elaborate on eight of them:

1. Get the right people on the bus. Great leaders hire the right person for the job, and ensure that job is also right for the person. It is not always about just hiring the candidate with the best credentials or most experience—it's about hiring people with potential whose values and characteristics align with those who have already demonstrated success in the position. Beyond reading credentials on a resume, recognize a good fit for the company and position based on a good understanding of the individual's characteristics—invest in talent management solutions, like assessments, to help identify the right people for each job.

2. Assign tasks within existing skill sets. Great leaders grow their team professionally by encouraging people to work within their strengths and develop their weaknesses, by balancing assignments in a way that enables their employees to keep learning and develop new skills without overwhelming them, and by offering praise and constructive criticism.

3. Set achievable goals. Great leaders drive their team to think big and work hard toward realistic goals. They are aware of the capabilities of their people, and don't pressure them to achieve unrealistic goals, knowing they could sacrifice quality for quantity. Leaders who set unachievable goals sacrifice the quality of employee work-life balance, the quality of work produced, and the quality of morale and culture. Great leaders know that progress takes time and big success does not happen overnight.

4. Lead by example. These leaders use professional behavior and judgment—they want their actions to be mirrored by their team. People learn how to behave effectively and make decisions by observing the actions of their leaders. Bosses are always in the spotlight. They can be the ultimate mentor, as people see their status and think "they must be doing something right to be in that position."

5. Continue your own development. Great leaders are constantly learning from their team members and growing their leadership skills. Business is always changing, and leaders must change with it. Great leaders use these changes and the resulting learning experiences as opportunities to take organizations to new levels of success, while less successful leaders may fall victim to change and allow it to disrupt their effectiveness as a leader.

6. Provide opportunities to develop new skills. Great leaders train their teams, not only to help their people become better employees, but also to develop the skills they need to grow. Such leaders develop themselves, and facilitate growth within their team, providing ways for team members to improve as people, as experts, and employees.

7. Hold yourself accountable. Team members should understand their leader feels accountable for the team's work. When team members know that the team leader will *take the hit* for their honest mistakes, they gain the confidence to explore different ideas and options beyond the *safe approach*. This enhances group cohesion and camaraderie.

8. Share your vision of success. When team members understand the vision of where the organization is going, they feel more engaged in the process, and find it easier to align their expectations and work product with the team and corporate goals. This helps the team members maintain focus and share the satisfaction of achieving their goals.

Use these eight ideas to become a more effective leader. Make them your own and apply them to fit your circumstances. When you own them and use them, you will be pleased with their impact on your leadership behaviors. **LE**

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Lasting Leaders

They possess five qualities.

By Barry Banther

Leadership isn't just something you do—it is someone you become. But that requires a personal transformation, not just a personal agenda.

One executive, Roger, hadn't learned this lesson. In an interview for a new leadership position, the hiring manager asked Roger why he switched jobs, and sometimes companies, every 3 to 5 years. Roger blamed the employees who stopped growing and doubted ownership's commitment to the goal they asked him to reach.

In blaming the environment, Roger was half right—it was the environment. But he was responsible for creating the situation.

Lasting leaders—those who weather economic downturns and seismic market shifts in their employees or customers—know how to assemble a diverse team and bring out their best. If you're not building relationships that will last with your associates, even your financial success will be short-lived.

To understand what defines leaders, we need to look at their followers. The old motivational tricks no longer work. Employees have become jaded from broken promises and failed dreams.

Today followers are drawn to leaders who show openness, invest time, listen, encourage and show appreciation for the strengths their employees bring to work. These qualities are developed intentionally over time, but they pay dividends in both financial and personal performance for a lifetime.

Leaders who are held in high esteem for their success on both the bottom line and with the people they lead epitomize *five qualities.* From their followers, you hear phrases like these: "he was always there for me," "I felt like she really listened," "he valued my opinion," and the result is employee engagement at the highest level. These qualities are gifts that a lasting leader is willing to give freely to the people they lead.

1. Gift of being open to others. Leaders may have an *open door*, but having an *open mind* matters more! Openness encourages employee engagement—vital to business success. As Gallup reports: "Employee engagement is positively associated with performance."

2. Gift of investing time in others. Leaders are usually not solo inventors or lonely creative thinkers. They are called to assemble a team of people and enable them to be more productive together than any of them could be alone. Leaders can't create time, but when they invest their time to build profitable relationships with their employees they are multiplying the results they can achieve. Choosing to spend time with their employees daily is a leader's best return on time.

3. Gift of listening to others. Trust between leaders and associates is built upon a transparency that reflects a freedom to speak and be heard. Bad culture, where listening isn't valued, impacts business every day. About 55% of a leader's work time is spent listening. But most leaders confuse *listening* with *hearing*. When we are open to an employee's ideas and invest the time to hear them, we are more apt to understand what they are saying, and not saying.

4. Gift of offering encouragement to others. Employees can work for hours without food or water. But they can't do quality work for more than a few minutes without hope—the hope that their work matters, hope that they can get the job done, hope that their effort will be appreciated by their boss. Few things show respect for employees better than surprising them with words that show you believe they

have what it takes to get the job done, despite their challenges.

5. Gift of expressing appreciation for others' abilities. When a leader gives away genuine appreciation it is mirrored back in improved attitudes, stronger commitment and better performance. Study after study documents that employees do not feel appreciated. The gift of appreciation is not about altering your associates' opinion of the leader; it's about changing their opinion of themselves. When a leader helps employees believe in their unique strengths they build a work environment that – works! Lasting leaders know how to bring out the best in others.

You can be appointed someone's boss, but not their leader. Your followers ultimately determine your leadership. Had Roger developed these five gifts he might have still moved jobs every three to five years, but not because he could no longer get results—he had developed a reputation for building a high performance team who followed his leadership even under tough conditions. Such leaders are always in high demand. **LE**

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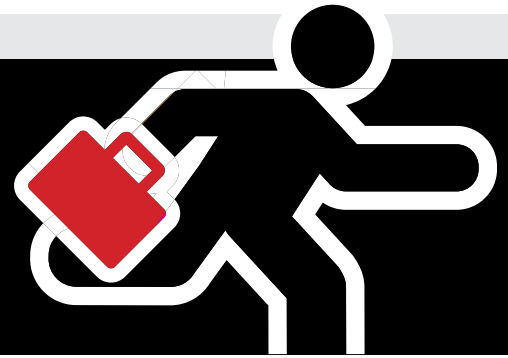
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Great Leadership

I find that it's all in the ratios.

By Brenda Bence

When I was new in my brand management career, working in the Eastern European division of Procter & Gamble, I learned a powerful lesson from a terrific leader named Ian, the GM of the country. During one year's budget season, Ian taught me something poignant that opened my eyes to how the best leaders spend their time.

That year, I was responsible for managing four brands. *Budget season* meant extra work, staying late to get the numbers and plans right for the coming year. This took place over several weeks and culminated in a big *budget meeting,* when we met with top managers, presented our proposed growth strategies and requested budgets, and defended our decisions and action plans that would affect our team's financial and operational activities for next 12 months.

That particular year, building up to the budget meeting, we pulled together plans that would help us grow our brand portfolio by 15 percent—as long as we were allocated the millions of budget dollars we needed. For 90 minutes, we presented our strategies, defended our plans, and fielded questions from Ian and others. We then held our breath.

Ian paused before he spoke, and then said, "Great job. It's a thorough plan, well thought out. Based on what you've shared today, I feel confident you will build your brand portfolio by 15 percent." As you can imagine, we were thrilled! I looked around the room at my direct reports, and their faces were beaming. Our hard work had paid off.

After the meeting adjourned, Ian asked me to stay behind. I assumed he wanted to share some personal congratulations, but that wasn't exactly what he had in mind.

"You and the team did a great job," he began. "It is a strong brand-growth plan, and I'm convinced that, properly executed, the strategies you've proposed will grow your businesses by 15 percent." Then, Ian continued, "But, what are you going to do to grow your *people* by 15 percent? You didn't share your plans for that. Actually, you'll need to grow your people by at least *20* percent this year to make sure they are ready to deliver an even more robust plan next year."

He was right—and what a lesson! Every budget plan I've since worked on has included a strategy for developing my direct reports' capabilities and careers.

How Do *Your* Ratios Measure Up?

Building business vs. people is just one ratio that great leaders should assess to ensure they're achieving the right balance. Here's an exercise to help you assess how you spend your time. Draw a circle, and let it serve as a pie graph that represents 100 percent of your time. Divide that graph into two pieces: 1) how much time you spend building *business,* and 2) how much time you spend building *people.* How is your graph split? What ratio reflects your current reality? For example, do you spend 80 percent of your time building business and 20 percent building people, or is it closer to 50:50? Next, under that same circle, draw a line, a colon, and another line: _____:_____. Let this represent the *optimal* time ratio for how you *should* split your time between building business and building people. Is it 30:70, 70:30, 50:50, or something else? You decide and write it on the ratio line.

Now, compare your current pie graph with the desired ratio. How big is the difference? How can you shift your ratio to be optimal? Other ratios you could use to assess yourself as a leader include:

Tasks vs. Relationships: Do you spend most of your time completing tasks, while neglecting relationships? Great leaders know that building relationships is as important—if not more—as tasks.

Liked vs. Respected: Do people on the job *like* you more than *respect* you or vice versa? Find the right balance.

Asking vs. Telling: Do you always tell your direct reports what to do, or do you ask them powerful questions that help them learn and develop their skills and ideas?

Talking vs. Listening: Are you a talker who forgets to listen to people? How are your listening skills? Do you pay attention before speaking to ensure that you understand the other person's meaning before you offer your opinion?

Using such ratios to assess yourself regularly, especially on the *people side* of the equation, will help you become the kind of leader others want to work for. In fact, ask yourself: Would YOU want to work for YOU? If not, pay attention to your ratios. **LE**

Brenda Bence is a Senior Executive Coach, Speaker, Entrepreneur who spent most of her career building brands in Fortune 100 multinationals. She is author of *Would YOU Want to Work For YOU™?: How to build an executive leadership brand that inspires loyalty and drives employee performance.* Email **Brenda@brendabence.com**.

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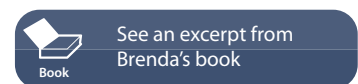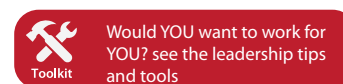
Conscious Victims

Who are they, and can they be fixed?

By Howard M. Guttman

By the time Laura's underperformance was discovered, it was too late. Clients at a Princeton-based consulting firm had first began to mumble to themselves and then to Laura, but when Laura continued to miss important client meetings and not show up prepared and on point for several engagements, clients took their unhappiness to the practice leader. When questioned by him, Laura explained that she had been dogged by recent bad luck: a divorce, medical issues, and aging parents. "I was boxed in by circumstance," was her justification.

When the practice leader asked her why she hadn't come to him sooner to discuss client unhappiness, she said that she feared that the president of the firm, reputed to be intolerant of imperfection, would catch wind of the situation and severely discipline and possible even terminate her. "I've never been comfortable with confrontation." Laura expressed great regret for her poor performance and lack of transparency, expressed commitment to her clients and company, and vowed to change immediately.

Laura's practice leader showed great empathy. While expressing dissatisfaction with her behavior, he moved into damage-control mode by assigning other consultants to the offended clients and told Laura that he would "keep this between us." He warned her that further problems would not be tolerated and sent her back into the fray.

Not surprisingly, six months later another major client complained to the practice leader about Laura's performance. The situation was similar to the previous one, with client complaints about her performance and Laura's attempt to hide out by not disclosing. This time, the practice leader was less sympathetic: Laura was terminated.

I call people like Laura *conscious victims*. Sadly, they're in oversupply and capable of doing serious damage. Like the garden variety of those who favor playing victim, there is a woe-is-me component to conscious victims. They blame their plight on circumstances beyond their control, be they other people, places, or things. In Popeye talk, "I yam what I yam." Since they believe that they are at the effect of problems and not their cause, how can conscious victims be held accountable?

Such a belief makes it easier for *conscious victims* to justify not being transparent and fingering others instead of taking responsibility for their situation. In Laura's case, her "story" was that the firm's president was too hardnosed to approach openly. She shifted the onus of responsibility to someone else, which justified her hiding out, hoping she could bury client complaints by not discussing them up front with her supervisor.

Unlike many who play victim, conscious victims are aware and even admit that their behavior is potentially harmful and disempowering. Even so, they choose not to shift. They believe they are scoring points by merely acknowledging what they are doing, versus doing something about it.

In their mind, this absolves them from being accountable. It's a cool trick, if you can get away with it. And conscious victims often do. Conscious victims tend to beat themselves up. When they get caught, they express regret and dissatisfaction with themselves. Sometimes the regret is even couched in some higher purpose, as was the case with one executive who rationalized his inability to meet deadlines

by claiming he was unable to say "no" to customer requests. "It's not in my make-up not to help."

When you are dealing with a conscious victim, the real challenge is to break the cycle that traps such people and those around them.

Conscious victims frequently reach out to enroll others in their "racket," as Laura did with the practice leader. Most often, they look to colleagues, coaxing them to be sympathetic to their plight. It's the wounded-puppy syndrome, and colleagues who offer protection aren't helping. Holding someone "small" doesn't encourage him or her to accept accountability, learn, and grow.

To ascertain if a conscious victim lurks on your team or in a cubicle near you, look for any of these **seven behaviors**: 1) artful dodger—it's not about me. It's about you, the organization, or circumstance; 2) doesn't deliver—promises to change, but never does; 3) hides out—lays low, flies below the radar, and plays an underground game; 4) self-justifies—offers reasons why, stories, and excuses; 5) great pretender—"I always have the good of the company at heart, but I have this one blind spot"; 6) is defensive—views feedback as feed*attack* and is programmed to give "Yes, but..." responses, justifications, and feel the need to constantly explain; and 7) enrolls others—reaches out to others to gain support or sympathy and to cover for dysfunctional behavior.

Once you recognize that you are dealing with a *conscious victim*, your challenge is to break the cycle that traps such people and those around them: underperforming, hiding out, offering stories and excuses when discovered, making promises, never shifting behavior, continued underperformance. Carefully probe the back story: What's their story about why they choose a certain behavior? How does that story benefit them, and what payoff do they get from holding onto it? What are the adverse consequences of doing the same? Ultimately, unless someone truly gets why he or she chooses to stay stuck in an unproductive pattern of behavior, nothing will change.

Behavior change begins with awareness. If you sense that a peer is a *conscious victim*— colleagues are often the first to discover a racketeer—be a coach rather than a friend or a censor. Help the person to become intentional: supporting his or her creation of a powerful intention, a self-empowering story, and a new pattern of behavior. Probe the existing story. Contract with the person about what needs to change—and how you'll support the effort. Jointly lay out a plan and hold him or her to it. Check in periodically.

Become a safe haven, so you are kept abreast of progress. Be at stake for your colleague becoming functional, but never collude. And never let the person off the hook.

There's no quick fix here, but there's real power when peers hold peers accountable. It just might turn conscious victims into conscious players and high performers. **LE**

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Broken Glass

Do you know why you have it?

By Shari Roth

Early one Sunday morning I was at the beach to catch the sunrise. While strolling on the boardwalk I noticed a couple of broken beer bottles. I noticed how people reacted to the broken glass on the boardwalk. There were two distinct groups: 1) the work crew, which was setting up the chairs and umbrellas for the day, and 2) the people visiting the beach.

The visitors to the beach basically fell into two groups. The complainers who were saying: *Why do people just throw trash on the ground and not pick it up.* The other groups of visitors were the ones who would take action by picking up some of the glass.

The most interesting group was the beach workers. They seemed enthusiastic enough about their work. They were diligently getting everything ready for the beach. However, they ignored the glass that was on the boardwalk—they actually **had to step over it** to complete their tasks.

Why didn't the workers pick up the broken glass? As a leader, you've likely asked this question of some people you lead. *Why don't my workers take action on something that obviously needs to be done? Do I have to tell them everything? Doesn't anyone take initiative around here?*

Your first reaction could be to say your workers are disengaged. We speak much about what *employee engagement* is and how to create a *culture of engagement*. Creating such a culture rests squarely with the leader. While we don't know the answer to why the workers at the beach did not pick up the glass, as leaders we have to ask ourselves, "What causes this lack of action?"

Training could be missing

You won't have a training session on how to pick up broken glass. And, frankly, such training isn't needed. What may be needed is training around the vision and mission. Not just training to memorize what the words but what do those words mean and what does it look like to actually *be* and *behave* the vision and mission. When people can make practical application of the vision and mission in the work they do, they'll pick up broken glass on the boardwalk.

The workers were well trained on preparing the beach: setting up the chairs, positioning the umbrellas, etc. In fact, they did an outstanding job of these activities. The fact that the broken glass was not addressed seemed to indicate a total disconnect between understanding that all the fine work they were doing was being eroded by not addressing the broken glass.

What about your broken glass? Before you just say it's all on the workers, look at it from a leadership perspective and ask: have we totally communicated what our organization is all about? Have we clearly given examples of what it means to live and work by our core values, our vision, and our mission? If you leave it up to your employees and staff to figure it out for themselves, you'll have lots of broken glass on the floor.

Where should the finger point for problems with employee performance? Often we hear complaints about employee performance. A manager can go on and on about their staff's inability to get things done. Pointing the finger at the employee and lack luster performance. However, one of the key characteristics of leadership is the ability to get results through others.

Here are **four things leaders can do** to boost performance.

1. Training. We usually provide proper training when introducing new things to our employees. However, with tight budgets, reduced staff, and time constraints, training is skimped and sometimes eliminated. Lack of proper training often leads to a big gap in performance. Training is the missing element in this employee's performance!

2. Support. Good leadership fosters behaviors that has people wanting to do whatever it takes to get things done. It's disappointing when I hear managers rant and rave to others about some employee. Some managers don't get that it is their responsibility to support the employee; and if the employee's performance is subpar, this reflects on the manager's ability to be an effective, supportive leader. When working with supportive manages, people feel more comfortable asking questions and more confident taking initiative.

3. Coaching and feedback. Let employees know when they are doing a good job. If you think that doing good job is just part of the job, you may withhold positive feedback. Employees are then left to feel that they only get spoken to when something is wrong. This causes them to avoid managers for fear they may get criticized. When you coach and give positive feedback, your people will perform their basic duties very well, and often excel by exceeding expectations!

4. Role model. Mangers often have standards for employees to arrive on time, do their work, meet deadlines, advise when they can't, and be a team player. These are reasonable expectations. However, in conducting leadership training, we hear managers ask for tools and tips to instill these standards and competencies into their teams. But what managers overlook is how their behavior impacts their staff. Holding yourself to equal or higher standards than you expect from your team makes a difference. Some managers feel they have earned the right to be exempt from these standards, thinking "I put in long hours" or "So many demands are placed on me", but employees look at the leader's behaviors to gauge what behaviors are acceptable and unacceptable.

As leaders, we strive to do our best, but sometimes we lose sight of our own performance because we are focused on getting the results from our team. If you're dissatisfied with the performance of someone on your team, take a look at these four areas to see if there are actions that you can take. You may be pleasantly surprised with the results. **LE**

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Art of Mentoring

It's a lot like panning for gold.

By Marshall Goldsmith and Patricia Wheeler

Panning for gold works like this. First, you put a double handful of sand in a heavy gauge steel shallow pan and dip it in the water, filling it half full. You gently more the pan back and forth and let small amounts of yellow sand wash over the side.

The objective is to let the black sand sink to the bottom of the gold pan. But impatience or strong-arming the way the pan is shaken means the black sand escapes over the side along with the yellow sand. Once only black sand is left in the pan, you are rewarded with flecks of gold, residing among the black sand.

Mentoring can be like panning for gold among the sand. Insight is generally not lying on top ready to be found and polished. If it were easy, the help of a mentor would be unnecessary. It lies beneath the obvious and ordinary. It is lodged in the dark sands of irrational beliefs, myths, fears, prejudices and biases. It lurks under untested hunches, ill-prepared starts and unfortunate mistakes.

Helping the protégé extract insight takes patience and persistence. It can't be rushed or strong-armed with the force of the mentor. It must be discovered by the protégé with the mentor's guidance.

As a mentor, you are in charge of getting the protégé to properly shake the pan. You help the protégé learn to recognize the treasures of insight and understanding, and not be seduced by *fool's gold*, achieved by rote and temporarily retained. The way you help the protégé handle the dark sand is central to the acquisition of wisdom. That's the essence of mentoring with a partnership mentality.

The concept of mentoring has had a checkered path in the work world. The typical characterization is that of a seasoned corporate sage conversing with a naïve recruit. The conversation would have been laced with informal rules, closely guarded secrets and stories from the mentor's history.

In recent years the term *mentor* became associated with affirmative action. Organizations took on the responsibility of connecting mi-nority employees with a mentor to expedite their route through glass ceilings and beyond old-boy networks. These mentoring programs sounded contemporary and some were of great service, but many were just lip service.

A mentor is defined as "a wise, trusted advisor, teacher or coach." Mentoring is that part of a leader's role that has learning as its primary outcome. Bottom line, a mentor is simply someone who helps someone else learn something that would otherwise be learned less well, more slowly or not at all. Notice the power-free nature of this definition: mentors are not power figures.

Good leaders do a lot of things in the organizations they inhabit. They communicate a clear vision and articulate a precise direction. They provide performance feedback, inspire and encourage and, when necessary, discipline. They also mentor. Not all mentors are managers, not all managers are mentors—but most effective managers act as mentors, embracing that part of their role that has growth as its primary outcome.

Review Your Year (Patricia Wheeler)

The close of every cycle brings with it the question of "what's next?" Countless meetings and planning sessions are held to address this question and recap the year. But how often and how well do you do this for your leadership development?

We suggest a personal *after-action review* consisting of three basic questions:

1. What did you set out to do this year? Did you create goals or targets that you set out to accomplish? This sounds simplistic, but in the fierce urgency of "the now," this often escapes us. Consider organizational goals/targets as well as your personal targets as an evolving leader.

2. What did you actually do this year? If you set targets for yourself, to what extent did you accomplish them? If you didn't set clear targets, what was the result of that? What obstacles and accelerants did you encounter as you moved toward the results you sought? Whom did you mentor this year?

3. What did you learn this year? How will you incorporate this learning in your planning for 2014? What goals and targets do you anticipate will be most important for you to achieve in 2014?

Developing yourself as a leader rarely happens by chance. A thousand urgent priorities can get in the way of this initiative. Take the time to reflect and prepare for how you want to impact your journey through time and the many lives that you touch.

Marshall Goldsmith is a top-rated executive coach and thought leader, author or editor of 31 books, including MOJO and What Got You Here Won't Get You There. **Patricia Wheeler** is Managing Partner of The Levin Group, a global leadership advisory firm. **LE**

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