

Leadership

Best Practices for Unleashing Leadership Potential in Everyone

By Rita B. Allen

What makes a good leader? Are good leaders born or are they made? These are age-old questions we have heard for many years and continue to ponder today. The leader of the 21st century does not necessarily resemble the leaders of the past. The characteristics, expectations, skills and competencies have changed over the decades. Leadership is a required competency of every successful manager and executive today. A good manager, however, may not always be a good leader – and a good leader may not always been a good manager. An individual contributor can also be a great leader. The ability to lead is essential for most professionals in the current competitive global marketplace. Can an individual successfully bring out the capabilities in others tapping into their utmost potential? Unleashing and realizing others' leadership talents is one sure way of measuring someone's leadership capabilities. Business executives are recognizing that success is largely dependent on their ability to identify, develop and retain leaders within their organizations. The fact that these potential leaders can be found at all levels of an organization and within all disciplines, however, is not yet equally recognized. Ongoing talent assessment is a key part of building a pipeline and preparing your organization for the future.

Today's global, highly competitive marketplace, challenging business conditions and ever-changing workforce require all organizations to be diligent, proactive and strategic with their people practices. Recognizing their human capital as their major competitive advantage is essential. All organizations – small, medium or large – have the ability to develop and implement talent management initiatives that are aligned with their organizational culture and linked into their business goals and objectives. Retaining top talent, critical skill sets, as well as up-and-coming potential is vital to the success of every company. Unleashing leadership potential in all employees is at the forefront of distinguishing high-quality organizations that are continuously employing *best practices around their talent management initiatives* and setting them apart from their competition.

4 LAYERS TO CREATING EFFECTIVE TALENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

1. Due Diligence – Understand your organization – Define its mission, values, goals, objectives, competitive posture, culture and business strategies. Assess your talent – identify required competencies, skills, knowledge and abilities needed to achieve organizational goals and whether they currently exist within your organization. Conduct gap analysis and explore appropriate talent management initiatives that are aligned with your business strategy, will address those gaps as well as extend the level of competency you strive to achieve and build for the future.



- 2. Planning** – There are many basics to ensure the proper planning takes place for creating and implementing practices that will prepare your organization for the future – Establish competency models and performance criteria for all roles. Invest in your talent with in-house focus on employee growth and development. Proactively engage your employees in continuous learning initiatives in a manner that embraces their involvement and input. Offer various learning and development initiatives including career development, career planning, career paths, employee development and/or succession planning to prepare your organization with the right competencies and talent required to meet its business goals.
- 3. Development** – Embrace ways to further expand your employees' personal and professional development to create leaders at all levels of an organization – Management coaching, mentors, advisors, performance management, competitive rewards systems, career centers and cross-functional development programs are a few ways to achieve a focus on leadership development throughout your



organization. Uncover leaders at every level of your organization by investing in the nurturing and development of that potential and gain competitive advantage by doing so.

- 4. Engagement** – Organizations that truly create and espouse a culture of employee engagement are continuously evaluating/assessing their talent and empower them with the knowledge, ability and authority to address areas for improvement with proactive, progressive and immediate solutions – First and foremost, engage in diversity initiatives that truly embrace the value of having differences in your organization’s workforce, embody that message in your actions and create best practices around diversity initiatives as a key driver for talent retention and talent management. Highly effective rotational programs, flexible work arrangement and knowledge management practices are other critical ways to have impact on organizational effectiveness. Keep ahead of your competition and build a sustainable talent management process by driving and implementing best practices that adopt the notion that human capital is your best asset.

How can businesses effectively do so with such a variety of work models that exist today? *For the first time in history, there are four generations in the workplace at one time with different needs, expectations, aspirations and priorities.* There is no one-size-fits-all solution to address the development needs of these demographics. Although this can seem quite overwhelming and daunting to say the least, it actually creates many opportunities for organizations to enable employees to take charge of their own careers while providing the tools, resources and venues to do so. There are best practices that will begin this process of employee empowerment.

BEST PRACTICES – PROCESS OF EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT; 6 STEPS FOR UNLEASHING LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL

STEP I – BUILDING INNER STRENGTH

It all starts and ends with inner strength! Self-awareness is the key to unlocking this potential. This means providing tools for employees to conduct a thorough self-assessment process that should be ongoing throughout their entire career. The first part of this process includes assessing their strengths, skills, competencies, interests, values, motivations as well as limitations. Next, it is crucial the employee keep a history of accomplishments and achievements and be able to distinguish the differentiating factors from their peers and colleagues. Can they define the unique characteristics, traits and/or experiences that set them apart? Do they possess areas of functional and/or technical expertise or specific niches? The ultimate goal is for the employee to be able to identify and articulate their value – the worth he/she has to offer. Self-exploration and assessment are just the beginning. Another important step for the employee includes engaging managers, peers, colleagues, staff and other appropriate contacts for their feedback. Conduct formal or informal 360° feedback exercises. Reaching out to others will provide further reflection, different perspectives and options that may have been overlooked. This gives individuals an opportunity to gain objective and deeper assessments of their capabilities, competencies and career highlights.

STEP II – ESTABLISHING COMPETENCY MODELS

Each role within your organization should have competency models with specific, well-defined performance criteria for success that can be assessed, measured and evaluated regularly. This creates a solid basis for accountability as well as assists employees with the process of identifying the necessary skill sets required to meet company goals and objectives and departmental deliverables. It also allows the company to begin to realize what gaps may exist in its current skill sets and the need to develop career paths, development programs and/or training initiatives to fill those gaps. Competency models give employees the tools to begin the process of self-discovery, self-improvement and development. It affords them a framework to build upon by identifying specific competencies for which to enhance and grow. Leadership competencies should be built into your models for all roles. This emphasizes the organization’s commitment to building and developing leaders internally as well as the basic principle that leadership can be excelled at all levels.

STEP III – CREATING INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

The next step is to formalize the information they have obtained in the first two steps to help employees create an individual personal and professional development plan. The individual is now prepared to challenge themselves even further by conducting a gap analysis. This requires a comparison of their strengths with the competencies required in existing or aspiring roles. Where do they fall short? Where do they excel? Once this has been done, the individual is ready to gather a list

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of areas (the gaps) that need to be developed further. After compiling that list, they can begin to prioritize and identify the top three to five areas they would like to work on improving further. It also gives them an opportunity to identify the strengths that they can continue to leverage. One way of doing this is by preparing a formal **SWOT Analysis**. A SWOT analysis is a strategic analysis of **Strengths** – strongest areas; **Weaknesses** – areas for development; **Opportunities** – situations to be seized for development; and **Threats** – obstacles, potential challenges in the way. This enables the individual to then develop and execute an Action Plan. An Action Plan includes four parts: a) identify and prioritize development areas the individual would like to turn into strengths; b) spell out realistic steps to achieve success with specific tasks, goals and accomplishments; c) plan out a timeline to follow and be accountable; d) create a follow-up strategy to measure and evaluate success making adjustments as needed.

STEP IV – REINFORCING GOAL SETTING

Without a plan, it is difficult for an individual to have a direction to follow throughout their career. Encourage your employees

to set goals, be strategic, deliberate and methodical in planning for the short term as well as the long term. Goal setting enables the individual to define an overall mission and objective for their career; identify long-term aspirations and short-term expectations; anticipate and be prepared for realistic obstacles and challenges along the way. Set high standards of excellence within your organization starting with the establishment of short-term goals for the next one to three years; and long-term goals for five years and beyond. Enable employees to carve out an execution strategy for how each individual will pursue their goals; and, most importantly, having a follow-up plan to keep one accountable. Review regularly and adjust as necessary. Goals are made to be changed, and many additional unexpected opportunities may present themselves. Encourage employees to be open, flexible and eager to follow new paths, but have a plan to start the journey!

STEP V – ENABLING AND ENHANCING RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

Relationship-building is an essential core competency for every professional today. This applies internally across all

TOP 10 COMPETENCIES OF LEADERSHIP

Listening Skills – ability to conduct and initiate dialogic communications; active and reflective listening; strong communications and interpersonal skills.

Emotional Intelligence – self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management, according to Daniel Goleman, psychologist and best-selling author.

Action-Oriented – leading by example; results-oriented actions; value driven with focus on learning; “walking the talk.”

Diversity Awareness – understanding importance of diversity for success; embracing cultural, social and economical needs and differences within this diversity; providing positive influences and role modeling; as well as promoting value-add for everyone.

Enthusiasm, Eagerness and Energy – generating positive attitudes and positive thinking resulting in high impact and motivation!

Responsiveness to Individual and Corporate Needs – anticipating the unexpected, taking a big picture perspective, thinking “outside the box,” and being proactive problem solver taking into consideration needs of peers, staff, superiors, team and organization as a whole with appropriate level of urgency.

Sense of Humor – keeping things in perspective, maintaining grounded and balanced outlook at all times; laughter can be stress releaser as well as team builder more often than not.

High Standards of Excellence – setting the tone for high standards of excellence; displaying behaviors that create trust and credibility; maintaining highest level of integrity, honesty and sincerity; holding a high bar for acceptable standards.

Influencing – ability to be catalyst for change and impact results; understanding needs of all stakeholders; rallying involvement and participation; and communicating in a way that engages responsiveness.

Proactive – strategic visionary; envisioning and anticipating future needs; looking ahead and translating goals and objectives into strategies, both short term and long term; seeing all possibilities and following through to execution.

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layers and levels of an organization as well as externally with vendors, consultants, suppliers, customers, industry leaders, professional associations, etc. Develop relationship-building opportunities for all staff reinforcing communications, interpersonal and customer service skill sets. Create empathetic leaders who place a great deal of importance on establishing, building and nurturing long-lasting relationships. This enhances ability to influence, engage, inspire as well as to welcome and manage conflict effectively. Emotionally intelligent leaders are not only effective leaders but contribute to a higher return on investment for an organization. Relationship-building also promotes an environment of collaboration and teamwork. Formal programs around coaching and mentoring can also serve as an extension to strong relationships. Organizations that train their staff on networking through relationship-building as well as encourage and allow opportunities for networking will stand ahead of their competition across all venues – business development, talent management, customer service, employee relations, organizational development, organizations effectiveness, market share and more. Support employees in developing, enhancing and managing their networking efforts internally and externally.

STEP VI – DELIVERING A FOCUS ON RESULTS

Whether it is on a personal or professional level, having defined deliverables for desired results around goals is the last step of empowering employees to tap into their leadership potential. When the individual knows

the expected outcome and has a focus, success is inevitable. Highly focused individuals are not afraid to take some risks, have tremendous drive and are self-directed. They know what they need to achieve, create realistic plans, manage expectations and follow through. Doing so prepares them to be equipped to manage change and make improvements as they go along. Focus on results not the process – this is a vital key to unleashing leadership potential in all!

Practicing these six steps will enable individuals to empower themselves to take charge of their careers and unleash their leadership potential. Most importantly, it builds self-confidence and inner strength and, in the end, that's the key ingredient to execute an individual's leadership capabilities. ■

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