Developing Leaders

Incorporate five critical elements.

by Lisa Mays Meadows and Steve Arneson

JUDGING BY THE NUMBER OF LEADER-ship development (LD) offerings, we presume that most companies believe it's possible to develop leadership talent. Some spend millions of dollars each year to deliver unique and meaningful learning in the hope that the experience will produce more effective leaders. Perhaps your company has its own LD program or sends executives to external LD courses. If you are responsible for creating or evaluating LD offerings, you need to ensure that the program has five critical elements:

1. *Motivation.* The person has to want to grow as a leader. He or she has to be hungry to improve and open to change. Some companies ensure this element by using an application process, whereby managers must apply for and be accepted into the program. Others use a rigorous nomination process to ensure the emerging leader's commitment and engagement. The person who is motivated and engaged will always learn and take away more than one who is just going through the motions. Invest in people who want to learn and grow as leaders.

2. *Powerful insight.* The learning experience must provide effective feedback and insight. Often collected using 360-feedback tools or personality tests, feedback from others and insight into core values and behaviors is the life-blood of the LD program. This gives participants a real sense of how others see them, or insight into how and why they do things a certain way. As you design your LD program, examine the feedback mechanisms and insight tools for practicality and relevance to your culture. Feedback from others should be constructive, applicable, and delivered professionally to ensure it's received properly. Personal insight

tools should be tied to specific outcomes, so that participants can apply the learning to practical behavior change. Powerful insight provides for meaningful growth.

3. *Skill-building.* Skill-building includes the teaching of proven leadership techniques and practices. Skill-building may include techniques for setting strategy, running effective meetings, communicating through story-telling, listening, delivering effective presentations, assessing operational risk, or making decisions. This is the core content of the LD program. Often, leadership skills are taught by external experts or by in-house *leaders as teachers* (senior leaders role-model the teaching process for participants). Carefully consider the program's core content; participants often judge the quality of the program based upon their skill-building experience.

4. *Real-world practice.* Many LD programs today have long timeframes to allow time to practice new skills on the job. This can be challenging, especially when the structure or culture doesn't reinforce the learning. LD programs that allow time between modules enable participants to try out new skills, and then reflect on and share lessons learned. Learning teams can be an effective way of reflecting on skills practice; in a safe environment, emerging leaders feel comfortable sharing what worked and what didn't. Involve managers in the program to encourage and mentor participants as they apply their new skills. You might also employ an executive coach to help participants practice and reflect. If you send executives to a learning event, think about how you can help them practice on the job. Without practice, new insights and skills fade quickly.

5. *Accountability for growth and change.* Effective LD cultivates a mindset of accountability. Emerging leaders are accountable for their progress after the LD experience; likewise, the organization is accountable to provide an environment where personal growth is possible. To cement learning, the organization has to encourage experimentation, bold thinking, and risk taking.

Ensure that these five elements are part of the development experience. LE

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ACTION: Design these five elements into your LD.

Authentic Leaders

They inspire and empower others.

by Bill George

I'M PLEASED WE CAN'T produce a clear profile of the ideal leader or pinpoint the definitive styles, characteristics, or personality traits of great leaders. If we had a cookie-cutter leadership style, we'd be forever trying to imitate it, making ourselves into personae that others would see through.

You can't be authentic by trying to imitate someone else. You can learn from others' experiences, but you can't be successful when you are trying to be like them. People trust you when you are genuine and authentic, not a replica of someone else. Amgen CEO Kevin Sharer, who gained priceless experience working as Jack Welch's assistant, saw the downside of GE's cult of personality in those days. "Everyone wanted to be like Jack," he explains. "Leadership has many voices. You need to be who you are, not try to emulate somebody else."

People have developed a distrust of leaders. Clearly we need a new kind of leader—*authentic leaders who rediscover the secrets to creating lasting value.* Authentic leaders demonstrate a passion for their purpose, practice their values consistently, and lead with their hearts and heads. They establish long-term, meaningful relationships and have the self-discipline to get results. They know who they are.

Since many people desire to become authentic leaders, we set out to answer the question, "How can people become and remain authentic leaders?" We interviewed 125 leaders to learn how they developed their leadership abilities. They discussed openly how they realized their potential and candidly shared their life stories, personal struggles, failures, and triumphs. They were chosen based on their reputations for authenticity and effectiveness as leaders. The group included women and men from diverse backgrounds and nationalities.

After interviewing these people, we understand why studies can't produce a profile of an ideal leader. These people did not identify universal characteristics, traits, skills, or styles. Rather, their leadership emerged from their