



The Journey Ahead

Developing the Next Group of Leaders

Both mid-sized and larger corporations have learned the hard lessons that promoting the next-in-line staff to a leadership position can proceed as the beacon of hope for continued success or hard line failure. And as for the newly promoted individual, the consequences can be invigorating or devastating in its lasting results of the leadership experience. More and more companies are giving significant attention to succession planning and the development of the next generation of their company's leaders.

Leadership development is not merely acquiring knowledge from reading books or attaining an MBA. Leadership is the transition from talented or technical individual contributors to those that can clarify aspirations, not just deliver the assessments of the company's current reality. The process of becoming a true *'leader'* is a journey that mandates commitment, discipline, passion, competency; and, an awareness of social relationships, personally and professionally. It is not a one-time retreat or rally building weekend.

In the 1990's, the clamor of human resource departments was, "people are the most valuable company asset." Companies learned that when you look for future employees, people show up. At that time, there was tremendous acknowledgement among all HR professionals. Unfortunately, not many companies acted on this fact. Re-emergent today is the same realism. Companies comprehend that leadership maturity and people growth is an effective and financial enhancement.

Potential leaders possess most of these characteristics:

- They are able to show a relationship between the company's vision and that of the employees' so that they can understand what they are committing to in action.
- They can definitively state what they stand for, what they will do in their role; and, what they expect others to respond to and do in the performance of their responsibilities.
- They display independent thought processes that they have outgrown the individual contributor role such as, the acts of motivation, spontaneous decision making, and long range visioning.
- They prove the ability to generate meaning for the specific goals that teams and departments are asked to perform; and, what teams will be delegated for specific goal achievement.
- They exhibit a richness of emotional intelligence, knowing that individuals are not cookie cutter images of each other. Every individual operates from their personal core values and will not respond the same to verbal conversations or situations.
- They demonstrate the ability to mentor or coach their team members or newly hired individuals.

As companies develop their own leadership cultivation programs, there are some key factors to remember:

- Leadership is not the property of individuals or departments. Most programs require the participants to be away from their current job for a period of time, attending structured classes, participating in projects to polish expertise, or to be on some form of revolving assignment for growth.
- Leaders introduce levels of change that can be uncomfortable for colleagues. Returning leaders validate older conversations that worked in the past; but, can now identify where they need to go



forward in creating new domains for conversations. They may bring in new vocabulary or expressions that peers may not have previously heard.

- Emerging leaders can establish new disciplines that frame corresponding actions for the future of the company. The journey into leadership also structures new relationships, up the hierarchy of the company; and, into outside client resources.

Successful leadership programs should be designed to meet your company's explicit culture and requirements. Programs such as, the San Antonio River Authority's partnership with the Karnes, Goliad, and Wilson County Extension offices offer the *'Texans in Leadership'* program. This joint venture allows communities to participate in the Texas Rural Leadership program. Future leaders are vital to the hopes of Texas communities. The program focuses on evolving leaders who will successfully identify and address critical issues, bringing improved conditions in their communities such as, revitalization and economic development.

As you develop your next generation of leaders, *ask yourself:*

- How will you design your leadership's social system to honor a mix of values eliminating the 'one value-one strategy' approach in any new programs?
- What is the plan for a continued shared future as markets and economics may change? Will there be quarterly meeting or annual retreats between the leaders and their direct reports?
- How are you assessing the capabilities of the rising managers for flexibility and adaptability in the coming future?
- How will you identify who in every department cares about succession planning, not just the HR department? How will you design meetings or outside forums to discuss these issues?
- How will you factor in mentoring and/or coaching into the development plan? How much time will you allocate for this part of the program?
- What are the benefits you would receive from having an effective leadership development program? Will the company benefit from a home-grown talent pool or keep the current culture in place?
- What are the estimated costs in turnover, lower productivity, and lower morale to not possessing this type of program now?
- How can you evaluate rising leader talent other than just the annual employee review?
- How much time, energy, and money are you willing to invest to develop a leadership program? Can you share this planning process with other departments? How can you estimate financial costs saving to the CFO or those that handle budgeting?

"The most dangerous leadership myth is that leaders are born-that there is a genetic factor to leadership. This myth asserts that people simply either have certain charismatic qualities or not. That's nonsense; in fact, the opposite is true. Leaders are made rather than born."
Warren G. Bennis

If this resonates with your current situation, we invite you to realize your efforts with us.