



THE 4 LEADERSHIP SKILLS YOU NEED MOST

How to Achieve Success Now and in the Future

In today's difficult economy and changing competitive environment companies are facing endless challenges coming from every direction. Among the most significant is building a team with the solid leadership skills necessary to address the immediate challenges of today, while positioning their companies for success tomorrow. Research done by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) has revealed that there are four key leadership skills that executives, managers and supervisors will need to achieve success as we move into the future. These include leading people, strategic planning, inspiring people and managing change. Unfortunately, the research also shows that today's leaders fall significantly short in those same areas. Seeking new staff who possess those leadership skills is not likely the best solution because the skills deficit is widespread. Qualified leaders will be highly prized, hard to find and difficult to recruit. The best approach, especially in the long term, is to implement an effective leadership development program.

Critical Leadership Success Factors

The CCL study, [*The Leadership Gap*](#), surveyed 2,200 leaders and 15 organizations in order to assess the quality of leadership skills in executive and management ranks. The report looked at 20 elements of leadership and identified seven competencies that are most critical for success now and going into the future. These seven are:

- 1) Leading People – directing and motivating people
- 2) Strategic Planning – translating vision into realistic business strategies, including long-term objectives
- 3) Managing Change – using effective strategies to facilitate organizational change
- 4) Inspiring Commitment – recognizing and rewarding employees' achievements
- 5) Resourcefulness – working effectively with top management
- 6) Doing Whatever it Takes – persevering under adverse conditions
- 7) Being a Quick Learner – quickly learning new technical or business knowledge

Among the most interesting aspects of the study is its revelation that the top four of these competencies are also the skills that are most lacking in executives and managers. While developing all skills is obviously a good management practice, the focus should first be on the top four.

The Leadership Gap – and What to do About It

An age-old adage says that “leaders are born, not created,” but research and experience say otherwise. Strong leadership skills can most definitely be taught and nurtured just like many other capabilities. Perhaps one reason for the misperception is that most businesses have not done a very good job creating and maintaining effective leadership development programs for their people. Focusing on the four most important leadership skills identified by the CCL study is a good place to start. Here are steps you can immediately begin taking:



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Leading People

The ability to effectively direct and motivate people is a vital leadership skill that requires an executive or manager to properly interact with staff. To be successful they must delegate well, treat people fairly, provide development opportunities for employees, recruit talented people and more. Here are ways to develop these skills:

- Make sure that leaders understand and apply sound management skills and exhibit behaviors consistent with established best practices.
- Assess the leadership skill levels for all management staff. Carefully select assessment tools that are appropriate and validated – such tools are available from management consulting firms.
- Once gaps in skills are identified, create or obtain development programs to build the skills your management staff need.
- Develop mentoring programs for your people.
- Train management staff to foster an open and honest environment where giving feedback can occur on a regular basis.

Strategic Planning

Turning a big, long-term vision into tangible business strategies is an essential management skill for leading companies from the present to the future. This skill can be developed in organizations by:

- Creating a strong vision that leads an organization toward a positive future.
- Sharing that vision with all staff, clearly saying where you are going and how you plan to get there.

- Developing your staff's skills in strategic planning, change management and execution.
- Involving both seasoned and up-and-coming staff members in your planning to gain a variety of different perspectives and foster buy-in across the organization.
- Creating a versatile, well-rounded management team through development programs that expose staff to a variety of departments, skills and perspectives.
- Encouraging learning through mentoring and developmental opportunities.

Inspiring Commitment

Managers can foster loyalty and commitment by knowing what motivates their people and taking appropriate action for each individual – rewards, recognition, communications and other activities. Build these skills by:

- Recognizing and rewarding employees.
- Sharing a clear vision and connecting it to each employee's role.
- Expecting high standards from everyone.
- Recognizing, rewarding and celebrating successes.

Managing Change

The rapid pace of change has become an ongoing business challenge. To effectively lead their organizations into the future, managers need to understand the dynamics of change, know who embraces and who resists change and possess the skills to inspire and motivate performance that positively leverages change. Develop those skills by:





- Involving your staff in planning, decision-making and implementing change initiatives.
- Providing, classes, training, forums and other resources that help staff manage change.
- Understanding that resistance to change that is commonly based in fear and/or mistrust can be overcome by regularly sharing information and providing frequent opportunities for discussion.

Begin With Yourself

Successful leadership requires authenticity. Your staff and employees will be more inspired, determined and dedicated if they feel your commitment and belief in what you say. Start by:

- Becoming self-aware and understanding your strengths and weaknesses so that you can more effectively manage through delegation and other techniques.
- Seeking timely feedback from coworkers, peers, friends, family and coaches.
- Aligning your business and leadership strategies by making sure that your business plans and staff development initiatives are in sync.

Conclusion

Effective leadership development is essential to the success of any organization, large or small. Creating and implementing a strong plan will elevate your team's skill level in the key performance areas identified by the Center for Creative Leadership. These are competencies that are essential for success today and, perhaps most importantly, as you lead your organization into the future. Assess your current staff's leadership skills, identify gaps compared to what your organization needs and implement a plan to close those gaps. Start now, and you and your people will be positioned for success tomorrow.

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