

BUILDING LEADERS

SOUNDBITES FOR CONSIDERATION



Formulating effective strategy requires working your way through any number of complexities and landing on a soundbite that intuitively describes the essence of your pursuit. To the extent that developing future leaders describes your pursuit, here are a couple of soundbites for your consideration.

START EARLY AND STICK WITH IT

It has long been standard practice to formally initiate organizational leadership development efforts when employees receive their first promotion into management. But why wait? Think about the content new managers typically learn in management orientation: Situational Leadership®; [emotional intelligence](#); DiSC®, social styles, etc. Most, if not all, of these skills can also be leveraged to help frontline employees contract for a leadership style or effectively influence an associate.

WHEN YOU GET RIGHT DOWN TO IT, LEADERSHIP IS A MESS!

In this context, many organizations are introducing leadership development strategies that initiate with employee orientation. They determine the content that aligns with their company values, teach it to new hires as soon as they possibly can, then reinforce that learning while building in additional layers of sophistication as careers progress.

Another question: Why change? When you get right down to it, how much difference is there between C-suite leadership and frontline leadership? When

CEOs or other high-potential executives receive executive coaching, the focus of those interventions are most often things like listening, delegating, communicating, providing direction, self-awareness, empathy, etc.

Net-net, identify and introduce core, common and critical content early, then systematically provide practicing leaders at each level of your organization with timely and specific feedback and feedforward.

DIVE HEADFIRST INTO THE “MESS”

Leaders are judged. It is a harsh reality that presents a formidable roadblock for many because, when you get right down to it, leadership is a mess! When you sign up for the role of leader today, you are greeted with traditional responsibility for hitting productivity targets, enhancing employee engagement and retaining key talent, with nothing remotely resembling traditional elements of control or stability.

With ever-increasing regularity, there is evidence to suggest leaders need to dive headfirst into the mess by implementing a strategy that prioritizes genuine employee engagement. This “trusting plunge” is expertly chronicled in Hubert Joly’s recent best-seller, “The Heart of Business.” Joly documents the resurgence of retail giant Best Buy by way of truly putting people at the center of the business and treating productivity as an outcome, as opposed to a goal. That may sound excessively bold, but we are convinced it is the best advice we can offer to anyone with interest in developing far-reaching leadership capability.

A leadership development strategy that prioritizes employee engagement and makes meaningful progress in “sorting out the mess” targets human dignity. It poses difficult questions, listens to the answers and engages employees in developing the solutions. Consider the work of Sandy Ogg (founder of CEOworks and former CHRO of Unilever) in that regard. This is a survey he and his team sent to every employee at Unilever with the following instructions:

If you cannot absolutely say yes to a question, you must say no.

- Do you have a job?
- Do you know what it takes to be successful in that job?
- Has training been made available for you to be successful?
- Do you have a career plan that is actionable and being acted upon?
- Is there an appropriate level of sensitivity to your personal circumstances?

We are guessing a survey like this takes maybe five minutes to complete. But the potential for meaningful, employee-centered discussions of dignity at work are limitless. And the thing we know about leaders initiating those ongoing discussions in a genuine, other-centered manner is that it positively impacts both productivity and retention. [🔄](#)

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