



Seven Steps to Developing Effective Leaders

Imagine a version of your organization that executes better, faster, and more consistently. Picture leaders who are aware of their strengths and weaknesses and have clarity around the kind of leaders they want to be and need to be. They will be more adaptable to change. They will be better able to connect with their teams and connect their teams to the larger goals with a sense of passion and meaning. They will break down silos that are holding the company back. In today's world, these things are not merely nice to have, they're must haves. Because, the fact is, your company is only going to execute as fast or slow as your leaders' ability to adapt to change in the marketplace and engage their teams in the business. Developing great leaders increases your odds of successful execution. The following seven tactics will ensure the leadership program you create will do just that.



1. Link leadership to strategy.

This tie is crucial for any successful leadership development to take place (or any training initiative, for that matter). Make sure you are clear about which behaviors are required for effective leadership in your organization and how those fit in the context of the overall company strategy. This lens needs to look at what's required for the organization today and where it is headed. Ask yourself:

- Do your leaders effectively recognize where the world is going and how that is affecting your business?
- Do they understand evolving customer expectations, demographic trends, regulatory influences, and the competitive environment?
- Can they make the link from those trends to the strategy of the company?
- Most importantly, are they clear on the evolution in behaviors and skills required to lead their organization in that environment effectively?

For example, if innovation management is emerging as a critical capability for future success, think about how your leaders need to lead differently to enable that to happen. All too often, companies struggle because the connection from the strategy itself to the new behaviors required to make that strategy happen is not explicit.

2. Be clear on what strengths to build on and the new leadership skills and behaviors you seek.

Your leaders got to where they are likely because they were successful and effective in the past. As strategies change at a faster pace than ever before, past performance is less of an indicator of future performance. Many leaders struggle to let go of things that have made them successful in the past, even if they don't serve them well for the future. This is enhanced when there is a lack of clarity on the shifts.

As you develop a program for leadership development, it's important that the business is very clear on the type of leadership styles, behaviors, and skills you want to continue to reward. For example, going back to the previous example that innovation management is a capability that needs to be embedded in the business, are your leaders managing in a way that allows people to safely take the risks needed to drive innovation? That might mean looking at performance metrics differently, celebrating the right type of failure, and modeling and encouraging a different behavior set than in the past. The important thing to emphasize for people is that the need to change is not an indictment of past performance, but merely recognition of what needs to be done to be successful in the future.

Driving leadership development excellence: *a case study*

One of the world's largest and most respected automotive finance companies needed to invest in developing its leaders in order to maintain the top spot in the market. They knew they needed to look at the outside trends that impact their business, take a long view of five to ten years, and ensure their leadership development enabled them to deliver their long-term objectives.

The company worked with Root Inc. to determine where they were successful and where the shortfalls were in the organization, from both a strategic and behavioral perspective. As part of a five-month rollout, Root created a two-day training program that included a custom Strategic Learning Map® module, an alignment session, and a game. The Map helped to effectively convey large amounts of information and enabled people to understand the drama, emotion, and complex stories of the evolution – allowing them to recognize why change needed to happen in the organization and with their leadership behaviors. Icons, infographics, drawings, conceptual illustrations, and metaphors relayed the story in a visual way and helped facilitate conversations to create a common understanding among those involved. The alignment session enabled the leadership team to productively discuss the challenges the organization was facing, while the game enabled the larger leadership groups to use scenarios to bring the strategy to life and see how that translated to the leaders' individual roles.

Since the company's leaders have gone through the leadership development experience, there is an open dialogue between the top 50 and the next 250 leaders in the organization. They're talking about what works and what doesn't work. As part of the ongoing nature of leadership development, the company has integrated a touchpoint on this topic into its semi-annual performance reviews, focused on the legacy of each of the leaders. Most importantly, the company is breaking down antiquated processes and revealing new efficiencies as it filters the message out to the rest of the organization through its trained leaders.

3. Assess where your leaders' capabilities are in relation to the company's future objectives.

It's important to determine what you need as you build the company of the future. You start by identifying where your leaders are today. What does your current reality look like when it comes to your leaders? How large or small is the delta between where your leaders and organization are today and where you want to be?

The best organizations are brutally honest, confront reality head on, and include leaders in the process of defining the current state. While this is a tough process, it will position you to get the most out of any leadership development initiative and from all of the people participating, as you'll be focusing on the areas that need the most improvement and will yield the best results.

4. Create a customized program relevant to your leaders.

Chances are whatever leadership program you put in place is likely not the first rodeo for your executives. Making it relevant and engaging becomes critical to get their attention. One-way lecturing and packaged content will likely not do the trick.

Leaders are seasoned and smart. The interesting growth happens when you debate the issues that are not black and white, but the ones that are specific and real to the unique situations your organization is experiencing and that require trade-offs. When you get to the real and difficult issues – the ones where the answers aren't obvious – that's when you really get their attention. Foster an environment of dialogue, of two-way conversation, of learning from peers on issues relevant to your business.

The process can't be one-way lecturing. Vary the modalities of how you engage your leaders, such as case studies, simulations, and roundtable discussions. Attention spans can be short, so different approaches that change the speed, tone, and the way people need to interact with the material are most effective. Above all, the program and the content should reflect the uniqueness of your business and your strategy and should be relevant to the leaders' roles and responsibilities. Theoretical alone doesn't cut it.

5. Start at the top.

Testing the program is often most effective when it's done at the highest levels of the organization. When this group is the pilot group, they take ownership in a way that will help drive engagement and adoption for the rest of the leaders who participate. Not only do they embrace the program when they're the ones involved in testing and refining it, but let's be honest: the first thing people will want to know is if their bosses are going through the program too. Company leadership should not expect anyone to participate in a program or initiative that they themselves are not willing to participate in or have not completed. This is the ultimate in leading by example.

6. Pilot with the target audience.

Before you wipe your hands of the program or mark it complete on your “to do” list, it is essential to take it out to a group of people within the organization to get some feedback. This ideally should be a group of people from the program’s target audience. Create your own focus or pilot group for a trial run. Hear what participants have to say, see how they react, and listen to their input. Then refine the program accordingly and position it for the most uptake in the larger rollout.

7. Make it a process, not an event.

One and done doesn’t work here. Developing leaders must be an ongoing process. The leaders in the organization must know that the new way of leading is an ongoing commitment by the organization. This needs to manifest itself in opportunities for continued learning, linking to goal setting, and in performance review conversations. You should make it a habit to find and celebrate stories of success throughout the organization to create lore and a culture that supports the strategy.

One note of caution as you embark on the journey: leadership development initiatives are sometimes met with skepticism. People think they’re loaded with theoretical jargon, models, frameworks, and presentation slides all wrapped up in a pep rally. This skepticism comes from past leadership training experiences that fell flat or were not relevant to achieving desired business outcomes.

Focus on developing the leadership abilities, behaviors, and attitudes of individuals in a manner that’s realistic and applicable. Most leaders are savvy – they’ve heard and seen a lot about leadership and have a strong, unique set of experiences they can rely on to guide them in their everyday roles. For leadership development to yield results, organizations need to meet their leaders where they are with what they need in order to grow and impact the business.

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About Root

Root is a strategy execution company that helps organizations engage people as a catalyst for change using a proven framework that consistently achieves clarity, ownership, and results.

