

The Leadership Deficit

In a post-pandemic society, people want to work for companies with purpose, and a strong culture embodying business philosophies that resonate with them intellectually and emotionally. Exceptional organizations all have cultures in which the leadership provides positive support and create an environment where people support one another, look out for one another, and look out for the organizational performance. However, now more than ever many organizations are experiencing a leadership deficit. The Development Dimensions International (DDI) Global Leadership Forecast examined the state and business impact of leadership development practices, and leader experiences within and across organizations in major industries and economies around the globe. This year marks the biggest leadership quality gap in a decade. Bench strength has reached an all-time low and leadership energy has taken a nosedive with 60% of leaders showing signs of burnout with only 28% of leaders being developed for the future of their organization, and the demands this new normal business environment presents.

Top CEO concerns

The top 3 CEO concerns post covid are attracting and retaining top talent; developing leaders; and maintaining an engaged workforce.



Source DDI Global Leadership Forecast 2023

Overwhelmingly there is a focus required on retention and leadership development to drive performance and ultimately business strategy and bottom-line business performance. Having a motivational climate begins to build the foundation for maximizing the talents and abilities of the entire

organization. This climate is created by the leadership, who drive the culture and the strategy of their organization.



A Laser Focus on Developing Leaders

So, what can we do as leaders to navigate the leadership deficit and not survive, but rather flourish, in this changing post-pandemic environment.

The first thing is to *focus on your people first and above all*. A key role of a leader is to create more leaders, not more followers. So have a laser focus on developing the leaders you have today and the leaders of the future. This means having an active development plan for every leader. A development plan that is created with the leader and is embraced by the leader. These development plans are the key to increased productivity of the leader, the people they lead, and the overall organization. Leaders must feel that being selected for development is an investment the organization is making in them, and this works to create an emotional investment by the leader, with the leader wanting to contribute to their own development and the performance of the organization.

Many executives feel that they are too busy driving performance to take time to develop their leaders, and this is a short-term recipe that will not deliver on the full potential of the leadership team, nor the organization. Developing your people is one of the most important activities or priorities for every leader.

Development plans must have very clear objectives and goals for the short and medium term. These goals must have definitive underlying actions that will be taken against stated timelines in order to be meaningful. We have seen many development plans, that at the surface look great, however as we dig a little deeper, there is no substance and no clear action plans and timelines in the plan – this is the proverbial “meat on the bone” which is imperative in a meaningful development plan.

At the heart of an effective leadership development plan is a motivational plan. How well do you know the people you rely on to accomplish your organizations goals? Motivation depends on individual needs and is developed internally. Any effort to encourage individual development and personal motivation must be done on an individual and personal basis. Get to know your people, and get to know what drives and motivates them!

Identify Leadership Development that is Effective

Many CEO's argue that leadership development initiatives do not deliver the sustained results and sustained business performance they expected. The reason for this is that many leadership development programs do not aim to work towards leadership behaviour change. Without a change in behaviour, we cannot expect a change in performance. We can read as many leadership books as we want – there are thousands out there – and we can attend as many leadership workshops and seminars or even leadership development programs as we want. However, if these initiatives do not deliver a change in behaviour, and an associated improvement in bottom-line performance, the initiative will be ineffective. *Effective Leadership development is action oriented.*

There is no shortage of leadership development initiatives out there and where so many leadership development programs fail is the translation of the theory and knowledge into tangible actions, effective practice through spaced repetition, and ultimately a change in leadership behavior which drives a measurable improvement in business performance. The reality is that leadership is really all about behavior. As leaders, we achieve results with and through people, and the only way we can influence or affect the behaviour of these people, is through the things we personally say and do – our behaviours! *“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.”* Whether this is the Einstein Insanity theory, or a quote attributed to the novelist Rita Mae Brown, it is undeniably accurate, perhaps except for buying the same lottery ticket each week, and finally buying a winning ticket. ***We need to first become effective leaders of self before we can become effective leaders of others.*** The fact is that we cannot change our personal performance in life or in business unless we first change our daily personal behaviors – our personal leadership.

The more difficult part of the leadership development process is to change how we think or see things – our attitudes – which are formed through conditioning of thought and actions. We can only recondition our attitudes through consistent behaviour change. Daily behaviour change and spaced repetition of this new behaviour will result in a change in our thought processes, and we begin to cultivate new thought processes, habits, and attitudes.

Drive Growth and Remove the Clutter

As leaders one of our key roles is to drive growth and to remove the clutter. We drive growth through several things, most importantly through developing our team leadership and the people on the team. We need to have clear performance goals, shared and embraced by the team and the people of the organization. The way we drive this growth and deliver results is through our people and our leadership teams.

Find ways to set meaningful goals, that are shared and establish the underlying action plans to accomplish these goals. Create an environment where engagement flourishes and people want to contribute to their teams and people actively care about their leaders and the people of the organization. Part of this, is to remove the clutter. As leaders we cannot be setting these wonderful goals that create an engaging workforce and drive performance and then put a thousand obstacles in place that prevent the goals from being accomplished and ultimately destroy engagement. Remove this clutter and find ways to simplify or eliminate work processes.

This is again about having that laser focus. *“Extraordinary results are directly determined by how narrow you can make your focus.”* – Gary Keller, The One Thing. This means that we need to be focussing on fewer things that really drive growth, rather than focussing on many things that simply have smaller side effects. We like to call these activities that drive growth our *High Pay-Off Activities*. The twenty percent that drives eighty percent of the growth. As leaders we need to be simplifying our focus to the core activities that really drive growth – the core essential high-pay-off activities, and remove the clutter by delegating, simplifying, or eliminating. Rand Slechta, the CEO of LMI International equates achievement to:

$$\text{Achievement} = \frac{\text{Potential}}{\text{Direction}^2}$$

This is having a laser focus on driving growth through our high pay-off activities, removing the clutter, and developing our leaders to do the same. The ultimate aim of leadership development is to equip our leaders and our organization to achieve their full potential.