



Critical Leadership Skills in a New Business Reality

Globalization and the increasingly international nature of business are changing the face of leadership. More than ever before, people from diverse backgrounds, age groups, and cultures are stepping into management positions.

Bringing people together from a wide variety of backgrounds creates not only tremendous opportunities for organizations, but also some challenges. Organizations can benefit from the new perspectives and possibilities that diversity brings if they are able to unite people with a common set of values and goals. If not, the result is misalignment, disorganization, and inefficiency as people go off in different directions based on their individual backgrounds.

For leaders looking to successfully manage in this new diverse workforce, a key skill is the ability to balance distinct cultural perspectives within the context of a clear vision and set of operating goals and initiatives. This allows a leader to say, "I know we're all coming into this with different values, experiences, and expectations, but in this company, this is where we are headed and this is what we are trying to accomplish."

In the new business reality, developing specific skills can help leaders manage more effectively, create positive relationships, and ultimately improve the performance of those around them.

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Open Communication: A Key Skill for Dealing with New Generations of Workers

Communication is one of the most powerful tools a leader can possess. In a survey conducted by The Ken Blanchard Companies® of more than 2,000 individuals, 41 percent said that lack of or inappropriate communication was one of the key mistakes leaders make. Conversely, 43 percent said that the ability to communicate effectively was the most essential skill a leader could possess.

One of the best ways to get everyone on the same page is by increasing the quality and quantity of conversations occurring between managers and their direct reports. The greater the diversity in a population, the more leaders must communicate to make sure they know what everyone's issues and concerns are. This is even more relevant with the upcoming generation of workers.

In his book *The Leadership Pill: The Missing Ingredient in Motivating People Today*, Ken Blanchard, with coauthor Mark Muchnick, delves into research conducted with workers in the Y or Millennial generation—people born in the 1980s and 1990s. This generational group is the largest to enter the workforce since the Baby Boomers and will play a vital role in the changing nature of workplace dynamics. This generation identified three things that they want from a leader.

First, they want a higher level of integrity. One difference among this generation in the workforce is how they respond to inconsistencies. In the past, when leaders were inconsistent, employees would talk about it with each other but might not confront the leader. Gen Y workers are more comfortable being confrontational than previous generations. People are much more direct, so integrity is vital.

Second, the newer generation wants a relationship that's a partnership. That doesn't mean that they necessarily want to be in charge or expect to be equal on the organizational chart, but they do want to be considered a partner. Younger workers detest some of the workplace language that was common in the past—words like "superior" and "subordinate," or "head of the department" and "hired hands." Next-generation workers want to be considered partners and want to be appreciated for what they bring to the party.

The final thing people want is recognition. And what separates this generation from those previous is that Gen Y workers place a special emphasis on being recognized as a total human being. In other words, they don't want to "leave their feelings at the door." They want their manager to know about them as a person and the issues they're dealing with both inside and outside of work. They do not want to be compartmentalized. This leads back to the importance of increased communication. Leaders need to continue communicating so that all employees feel cared for, understood, and supported at work, and that they're making a difference.

Bringing Out the Best in Everyone

Two heads really are better than one. When that thinking is applied to the more varied work environment of the future, it creates a road map for success going forward. In the past, leaders may have gravitated to those who were of a like mindset. But successful leaders know that diversity in thinking makes for richer solutions and approaches.

One of the great advantages in having a diverse population is that people can tackle a problem from a variety of viewpoints. But it's imperative to encourage participation from everyone and to listen deeply to what people have to say in order to make them feel heard and included.

Today, we need more rather than less involvement from all stakeholders, but it doesn't mean leaders should immobilize themselves trying to create consensus to ensure everyone is heard. The face of leadership is changing. The old ways of doing things must not dictate how to lead in the future. By using the excitement, willingness, and capability of people from diverse backgrounds, leaders will find they're able to make a significant impact in the organization, the community, and all walks of life.

Developing a Leadership Point of View

Noel Tichy's book *The Leadership Engine* shows that effective leaders have a clear, teachable Leadership Point of View and are willing to share it with and teach it to others, particularly those they work with. When leaders teach their Leadership Point of View, people not only have the benefit of understanding where the leader is coming from, but they're also clear on what the leader expects from them and what they can expect from their leader. When developing a Leadership Point of View, leaders benefit from self-reflection and become more intentional in their process of leading and developing others. And by sharing it, they accelerate their colleagues' understanding of what makes them tick and their sense of connection to them. Letting people learn about the values and about the key people and events in a leader's life makes them more authentic and accessible in the eyes of their staff.

In developing a Leadership Point of View, the individual identifies leaders who have had an impact on them. Thinking in terms of teachers, coaches, parents, or past bosses, the leader can identify what they learned from these people about leadership. It's important for leaders to identify a sense of purpose about what they want to accomplish in life as well as the core values that will guide their behavior and keep them on track to live in accordance with their purpose. Finally, leaders need to focus on how these core beliefs and values influence their assumptions and beliefs about leading people, what their people can expect from them, and how they intend to set an example.

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With these components in place, a leader can then begin to craft a Leadership Point of View or a statement about how all these components will integrate. The result will be a picture of the future where there is consistency between the leaders' values, words, and actions.

Creating a Leadership Point of View helps individuals be more authentic and more fully themselves, since the face they show to their people is real rather than a projection of who the individual thinks they should be. It allows individuals to be more intentional and congruent. And it may inspire others to create their own Leadership Point of View even if they aren't currently a leader.

Having a Leadership Point of View allows individuals to communicate with people's hearts. And once that happens, a leader will find that people will

- be committed to achieving what is important to them and to the organization
- remember what the leader says
- have faith in the leader and will trust them
- give their best
- commit to staying and growing with the leader and the organization

Make People Your Business Partners

To maximize loyalty, leaders must focus on making their people partners while balancing leadership authority.

Part of the partnering mindset begins by creating an open-book management culture where information is freely shared. In fact, this practice can also unleash creativity. Arming employees with information, this open-book policy can unleash a torrent of innovative ideas, fresh perspectives, and increased commitment.

This can be especially true when an organization is facing tough issues like downsizing or cost cutting. And the new generation of workers thrives when included in solution development; they can provide a unique approach to systems and business operations, especially when they have access to all the relevant information.

Sharing information about any situation the organization is facing accomplishes two things. First, it helps eliminate fear because leadership and frontline employees have access to the same information. Sharing information builds trust and honesty and negates any hidden agendas. Second, it helps to create buy-in. Once everyone is clear about the situation, people can become involved in taking action to improve things.

Focusing on Both Results and People

In his book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins writes that the great leaders are focused on both people and results—even in tough times. Too often, in tough times, leaders forget about people. They begin to focus on the bottom line. And they forget this crucial element: balancing both people and results.

Great leaders and great people are the glue that holds companies together. To illustrate this point, imagine this scenario. If you had to make the choice of losing your equipment and your buildings to a fire or having all your people resign in one day, which would you choose? Which would be worse?

Most leaders would opt to lose equipment and buildings over people. Buildings can be rebuilt and equipment can be replaced. But people can't be, and organizations that forget this fact are making a huge mistake.

Focusing on people creates loyalty. Good employees can always go somewhere else if they feel that their organization doesn't balance a concern for people with a concern for results. What works in the short term can end up holding the company back in the long term.

Summary

The challenges facing leaders are greater than ever before. Workforce diversity and globalization are changing the way leaders need to interact with their people in order to optimize performance. But by establishing open communication, creating a high-involvement culture, and sharing a Leadership Point of View that honors both results and people, leaders can develop a balanced and healthy work environment that encourages people to give their all.

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