

# Critical Leadership Skills in a New Business Reality

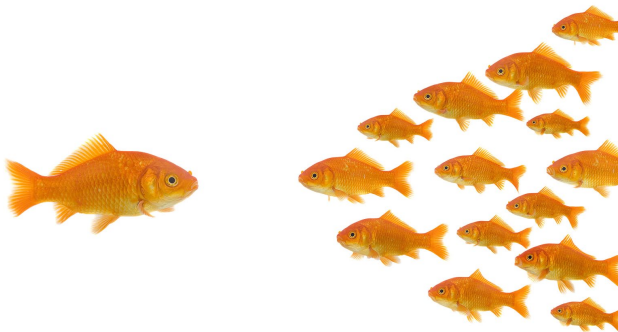
Globalization and the increasingly international nature of business is changing the face of leadership. More and more people from many different backgrounds, age groups, and cultures are stepping into management positions than ever before.

Bringing people together from a wide variety of different backgrounds creates 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 and disorganized inefficiencies as people go off in different direction-based on their own individual backgrounds.

For leaders looking to manage successfully in this new diverse workforce, the ability to balance different cultural perspectives within the context of a clear vision and a set of operating goals and initiatives is a key skill. This allows a leader to say, “I know that we are 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.



## 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% said that lack of or inappropriate communication was one of the key mistakes leaders make. Conversely, 43% 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 amount of diversity that you have in your population, the more you have to communicate to make sure that you know what each other's issues are, and what each other's concerns are.

This is even more true for the coming generations of workers.

In his book, *The Leadership Pill: The Missing Ingredient in Motivating People Today*, Ken Blanchard delves into research with coauthor Mark Muchnick 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 Boomer generation and will play a key role in the changing nature of workplace dynamics. This generation identified three things that they wanted from a leader.

First, they want a higher level of integrity. What’s different among this generation in the workforce is how people respond to inconsistencies. In the past, if leaders were inconsistent, employees would talk about it with each other, but might not confront the leader. The younger generation in the workforce today is more comfortable being confrontational. People are much more direct, so integrity is important.

Second, the newer generation wants a partnership relationship. That doesn’t mean that they want to be in charge necessarily, or expect to be equal on the organizational chart, but they do want to be considered a partner. One of the things that younger workers hate is some of the past language that used to be commonplace in organizations—words like “superior” and “subordinate,” or “the head of the department” versus “the hired hands.” Next generation workers want to be considered partners and appreciated for what they bring to the party.

The last thing that the newer generation of workers wants is recognition. And what separates this generation from those previously is that they place a special emphasis on being recognized as a total human being. In other words, they don’t want to “leave their nerve endings at the door.” They want their manager to know about them as a person and the issues they might be dealing with both in and out of work. They do not want to be compartmentalized. This leads back again to the importance of increasing communication. Leaders need to keep on communicating so that all employees feel cared for, understood, and supported in making a difference at work.

### **Bringing Out the Best in Everyone**

Two heads really are better than one. When you apply that thinking to the more diverse work environment of the future, you have a road map for success going forward. In the past, leaders may have gravitated to those who were of like mindsets. 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 you 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 to make in order to opportunity.

Today, we need more involvement rather than less involvement from all stakeholders, but this doesn’t mean that leaders need to immobilize themselves trying to create consensus in order to ensure that 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 the capability of people from diverse backgrounds, leaders will find that they are able to make a significant impact in your organization, in your community, and in all walks of your 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 the people they work with. When leaders teach people their leadership point of view, they will not only have the benefit of understanding where you are coming from, but they will also be clear on what you expect from them and what they can expect from you. When developing a Leadership Point of View, leaders benefit from self-reflection and become more intentional in the 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 key people and events in your life and sharing your values, makes you more authentic and accessible in their eyes.

When developing a leadership point of view, the individual must identify leaders who have had an impact on them. Thinking in terms of teachers, coaches, parents, or past bosses, the individual can identify what they learned from these individuals 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 with living 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.

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.
- People will remember what the leader says.
- People will have faith in the leader and will trust them.
- People will give their best.
- People will 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.

## About The Ken Blanchard Companies\*

The Ken Blanchard Companies® is one of the world's leading training and development experts. We create lasting behavioral change that has measurable impact on the organizations we work with. We provide training that makes a difference.

Our programs are based on behavioral models that add a situational context to the training experience, so individuals learn to be more productive in real-world scenarios and make the shift from learning to doing more quickly and effectively.

As the innovator of the most widely used leadership development system in the world, Situational Leadership® II, we provide groundbreaking thinking and a memorable learner experience. We begin with a collaborative diagnostic process identifying your unique needs and business issues, then develop an appropriate leadership strategy.

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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 good ideas, fresh perspectives to problem solving, 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 generation and can provide a unique approach to systems and business operations, especially if 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 take 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 important element—balancing both people and results.

Great leaders and great people are the glue that hold 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 of your people resign in one day, 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 that are making a huge mistake.

Focusing on people creates loyalty. Good people 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 is 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 a leadership point of view that honors both results and people leaders can create a balanced and healthy work environment that encourages people to give their all.