

LEADING BY DEVELOPING OTHERS

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“Do you see yourself moving up in this organization?”

This question posed by a senior leader caught me off guard. I had thought about moving up and taking on greater responsibility, but no one had raised the question to me so directly before.

My somewhat indecisive response led the leader to say, “Look, you are doing a great job in your current assignment, but if you want to move into a senior leadership role, you have to develop others who can take over your job.”

The message was clear: You can’t lead if you can’t develop others.

There are three realities in leadership:

1. Leaders are defined by their results.
2. The act of leadership is about the ability to influence others to accomplish the desired result.
3. You and your organization will never consistently achieve amazing results if you can’t or won’t develop others to excel in their work.

Many people in positions of authority operate from a belief that their situation defines the expectations and potential of their team. The outcome of their thinking is a self-imposed lid on what can be accomplished.

The best leaders understand that the talent they engage, develop and grow ultimately defines their level of success. More bluntly, you get better terms in a negotiation when you develop better negotiators. You get more sales when you have better sales people. You get more effective leadership when you develop better leaders.

Your Job in Developing Others

A leader has three responsibilities when it comes to developing the talents of others:

Inspire and motivate: For some, the model for inspiration and motivation is the stereotypical image of an athletic coach giving his team a motivational speech. This is one approach for inspiring and motivating, but there are other ways as well. Giving sincere recognition for a person’s contribution and effort works. So does a stretch assignment or visibly connecting the individual’s personal

goals to the accomplishment of the team’s goals. An effective leader continually looks for ways to keep people motivated and engaged toward achieving results.

Instruct and develop: The best and worst performing member of an athletic team, dance troupe or a symphony orchestra share something in common. They both receive instruction and coaching to improve their performance every day. Their development is a proactive plan based on the needs of the organization, their individual strengths and weaknesses and their personal goals. Why should it be any different for your organization?

Correct and encourage: Correcting and redirecting performance and behavior that doesn’t meet expectations is an important part of a leader’s job. The only person who never makes a mistake is the one who never tries something new. There is a fine line between correcting and punishing, however. A person who feels unfairly punished quickly learns to do just the minimum. That is why correction must always be combined with encouragement if the goal is to build long-term commitment. The purpose of correction is to return the individual’s performance to accepted levels and create an environment where they are encouraged to sustain and enhance that performance.

Where Do You Invest Your Time?

Look at the three components again. Where do you devote your time and energy today?

If the answer is “correct and encourage,” you should set a new priority and reallocate your time commitment. Time invested in inspiring, motivating, instructing and developing minimizes the need for correcting. And the credibility you earn from proactively helping someone succeed will minimize the potential for hard feelings when you do have to correct another’s performance.

Here’s the news: Your team will never consistently achieve amazing results if you can’t or won’t develop others. Your success as a leader relies on your ability to develop others who have the ability and commitment to succeed.

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