

Five ways to develop great leaders

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When an organization's culture of leadership improves, everything improves. Leaders impact strategy development and execution, mission realization, productivity and results. Leaders also have a far-reaching impact on the people around them. According to Gallup's report entitled *State of the American Manager: Analytics and Advice for Leaders*, great leaders are proficient in five areas: they motivate others; assert themselves to overcome challenges; build strong relationships; hold themselves and others accountable for high performance; and make informed, unbiased decisions for the benefit of the greater good (Harter and Rigoni, 2015).

However, Gallup's research also found that only 10 per cent of employees naturally possess leadership skills, and 20 per cent of employees can develop as leaders if their organization invested in appropriate development plans.

What is often missing in the leadership equation is the identification and development of this high-potential leadership talent. When organizations find the right employees with the potential to lead and give them the development they need, everyone benefits.

Organizations can build their leadership pipeline and build competencies needed to lead people to perform to their best potential for the good of the

company, others around them and for themselves.

Here are five ways organizations can develop exceptional leaders.

1. Distinguish employees with leadership potential

Human resource professionals can provide valuable guidance and tools to help hiring managers understand and identify the difference between high potential and high performance as part of the selection process for supervisory roles. The CEB outlines three characteristics high-potential employees have in common: aspiration, ability and engagement (CEB Global).

Organizations should incorporate leadership skill assessments as part of performance evaluations or talent assessments to identify high-potential employees wherever they may be in the organization. When advancement opportunities become available, make a review of leadership potential part of the internal recruiting process before promoting employees into a supervisory or management role. This approach helps to keep harder to quantify leadership potential in mind rather than the focus on past successes or technical skills.

2. Develop new leaders early on

Organizations need to set new leaders up for success by helping them acquire and assimilate great leadership skills early in their new role. This may seem obvious, but

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only 43 per cent of organizations reported little or no effective leadership development for first-time leaders and supervisors (Loew, 2015).

Start by setting clear expectations for what you want leaders to do, such as holding frequent one-on-one meetings. Once new managers know what is expected, they will need ongoing direction and tools to help them in their role. This can include discussion guides, advice for managing difficult discussions and resources for overseeing employee development. They will also benefit from learning convenient methods for documenting discussions and following-up on necessary activities and actions.

3. Use leaders to drive culture and strategy

The ability to successfully drive an organization's strategy and culture is one of the most important functions of a great leader. Mid-level and frontline leaders are critical connectors in cascading a strategy from those who create it to those whose behavior actually make it happen.

To avoid the kind of disconnect that leads to disappointment in implementing strategic initiatives, leaders at all levels must be able to explain initiatives to employees and demonstrate how their work supports it.

Employees will be more invested in the outcomes if leaders involve them in setting performance goals that are aligned both with organizational priorities and their own developmental needs and career aspirations. This approach can lead to a greater understanding between employee contribution and satisfaction. These two items are critical for fostering greater employee engagement that comes

when employees understand how their work makes a difference to the organizational mission and contributes to their own career goals.

4. Develop coaching skills

Many organizations see the ability to provide effective feedback and performance coaching as one of the most critical leadership skills (Loew, 2015). Building coaching skills requires a delicate balance. Leaders must learn how to determine the appropriate level of oversight to monitor progress on goals. When they start to see issues developing, they need to apply effective and timely intervention to ensure success without micro-managing.

A large part of the coaching role includes knowing how to give effective feedback that is objective, observant, reinforces or remedies critical behaviors, supports growth and development and helps the employee know what to do next. Easy-to-remember models, such as "observation, impact and action" help managers make performance coaching a habitual part of their everyday leadership activities.

Great leaders tie performance to development by using performance discussions to identify opportunities for their employees' professional and personal growth. This keeps the discussion positive, collaborative and focused on what matters to the employee and to the organization.

5. See individuals within the team

Teamwork is important, but great leaders must know how to encourage, develop and relate to the individuals within the team. This can be particularly challenging in a diverse, global workforce. Leaders

should be encouraged to make time to get to know their team members' individual learning and working styles, values and passions, as well as their strengths, development needs and career aspirations.

Provide training that enables leaders to build and develop teams where each member contributes from their strengths while supporting and learning from each other.

Additionally, leaders need to master the art of managing across geographic, cultural and generational distances. They need training to help understand and adjust for these differences, and this approach will help to avoid misunderstandings and cultivate a positive team environment (Meyer, 2014). Leaders can take advantage of tools for communicating and building community that help to span differences.

5.1 Developing great leaders improves everything

Organizations that want to improve culture, strategy, engagement and the bottom line will benefit most by investing in improving leadership at all levels. This can begin with identifying employees who naturally possess leadership potential. From front line to C-suite, leaders can benefit from developing their skills in understanding, respecting and developing others, as well as realizing strategy through goal alignment and coaching for high performance.

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About the author

Anita Bowness joined Halogen in 2014 with nearly 20 years' experience in consulting and

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