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Awakening Leadership Within

Who's Leading Now?

What does it take for an organization to develop leadership capabilities for the future? It takes a combination of elements to create a successful plan for leadership development that will ensure a thriving organization in the future, able to be strategically agile and prepared for a new way of conducting business.

First, it takes a passion for excellence, starting at the highest levels of your organization. From CEO on, each and every person must take responsibility for cultivating leadership. Without the direct involvement of top management, and incentives to promote and reward mentoring, and leadership characteristics and competencies defined by the company, most programs will either fail or merely take up space. Research has shown that the top companies cultivate leadership at all levels so as the C-level executive demonstrates the values associated with leadership, so must the Vice President, Director, Manager, Supervisor and Employee. All levels should have an orientation around a specific few guiding principles that illustrate what the resulting behaviors would be.

Second, it takes attention and focus on developing who you have in your organization. Mentoring, coaching and feedback and training provide a basis for cultivating the high potential individual. Mentoring provides a formal process where a protégée may be introduced to influential individuals and programs that can advance their careers. Executive coaching is a highly successful developmental tool that can assist real time, applying new skills and behaviors immediately. Feedback, through assessments and as an on-going process, can hone communication and relational skills. Training should be based not only on developing skills and filling gaps but should take into account the needs of the future organization, training to competencies that will be required in the future, specifically designed to address the needs and objectives of the specific organization.

Third, it takes organizational alignment; knowing why the organization exists, knowing the direction it is headed and establishing criteria and competencies that are aligned with the organization's objectives that must be met in order for an individual to move into a leadership position. To ensure success, all development strategies should be linked to the strategic plan of the organization and be correlated to the measurements used for business objectives, which include financial measurements, resource measurements such as turnover and retention, client



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satisfaction, employee satisfaction and organization cultural measurements.

Research also indicates a correlation between leadership development and long-term financial return. Companies that value leadership development as a core value consistently outperform their competition while producing a higher level of commitment from their employees.

The future of companies will depend on their ability to cultivate and retain the talent within and to attract the right talent from the outside. Demographics indicate that the current typical leader, a white male, will be less available in the future. Now is the time to actively recruit for and embrace the development of high potential women and people of color. Opportunities to have a broad range of management experience and access to mentoring have been limited for women and minorities in the past. Moving high potential talent across the organization, exposing them to a variety of assignments instead of keeping individuals in "silos" will add to the real life learning and the development of cross-section relationships that will prove invaluable in the future as they move into leadership positions. Organizations that provide these opportunities to all high potential individuals will reap the rewards in the future with a broad range of leaders ready and able to step in and step up.

Take a look within your organization. Who's leading now? More importantly, who will lead in the future and what are you doing about that now?

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