

How to increase your leadership success potential

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As executive coaches, we work with dozens of top-level organization leaders in the U.S. and Canada. These leaders courageously endeavor to learn, grow and succeed personally and professionally. The following five high-level focal points, we believe, increase the potential for leadership success.

- **Engagement:** For the most part, our society has failed to develop vibrant, creative work cultures. What's out there in the world of work is a proliferation of highly pressured, frenetic environments where research shows the majority of people are disengaged.

How do leaders create an environment for engagement? Today's thought leaders are clear that the command and control paradigm does not work. In our experience, employees become engaged when leaders tune into employees' feelings and create an environment of safety and trust. When the truth can be told without fear of embarrassment, retribution or blame, and when employees are trusted to do their jobs without interference, true ownership results. .

- **Self-awareness:** Leaders, by virtue of positional strength alone, are powerful figures. Yet often they are unaware of their impact on their organizations. If we accept the axiom that every organization is a reflection of its leadership, then leaders would do well to increase their self-awareness. With increased awareness comes the ability to make behavioral changes, increasing the potential for business success.

What does it take to increase leadership awareness? It takes the daily practice of being an observer, noticing the impact -- both internal and external. It takes more and deeper listening, less talking and telling, and more asking. It takes soliciting feedback and the courage to hear it. The result is more energy, creativity, and better decision-making as well as transparency, flexibility, approachability and empathy.

- **Values:** Leaders need to take back what many have lost on their journey to the top. Their core values, their passion to serve, their intuitive insights and their willingness to take intelligent risks are a few examples. By operating off-center from your values, you will expend more energy by being someone you're not. Living from the "inside out," in other words living in alignment with one's core values and passions, is more energizing, productive, creative and fun.

How can the leader get back on track? Values show up in our day to day experiences. They influence our behavior and decision making, sometimes at a conscious, but often at an unconscious level. Try examining recent decisions to uncover the value underlying your choice. Another place to look is at particularly fulfilling experiences. Fulfillment is a sure sign that our values are being honored.

Working with a coach can expedite this process. It may take courage, faith, time, and patience, but it will reward dividends for all.

- **Empathy:** The current global environment of business uncertainty increases employee anxiety and fear. Leaders who have developed the capacity to empathize with and deal effectively with the insecurity and sense of failure so often experienced by employees will be able to build community and inspire employees to higher levels of achievement.

How can leaders increase their empathic capacity? Empathy is a quality we associate with servant leadership. It relates to the ability to walk in the shoes of others: Do not make assumptions but really get a sense of what others are going through. One of the easiest ways to increase empathy is to stop talking and listen to the voices of those who work for you. Take time to understand and "get into" their experiences. You cannot anticipate employee needs if you cannot see things from their point of view.

- **Adaptive capacity:** Leaders are operating in an environment beyond rapid change -- sometimes verging on chaos. No matter what they do, they are likely to face periods of uncertainty. Leaders cannot afford to be complacent about these challenges and would do well to anticipate them and develop adaptive strategies.

How do leaders develop adaptive capabilities? Adaptive leaders will develop their employees' resilience and bring about attitude and behavior changes. The skills required include the ability to see issues from different perspectives, to appeal to employee feelings, integrate competing values and to provide empowering support. Leaders who can adapt and find ways to encompass the energy of hope and possibilities in the face of ongoing challenges will increase the potential to succeed.