

How Leaders Succeed—They Renew!

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In this **Leadersynth** series, we have explained that leaders learn, empower, achieve, direct, and en-spire others. In this final edition of our seven-part series, we focus on the need to “renew”. As a reminder, we believe that, to be a successful LEADER, it is critical that you:

- Learn
- Empower
- Achieve
- Direct
- En-spire
- Renew

Renew. To renew is to look continuously for ways to improve, change, tweak, or innovate. Depending on their core personalities and abilities, leaders renew in a variety of ways; the similarity is that they continue to look for paths toward *improvement*. They encourage this “looking with new eyes” in others by setting the expectation that the future of their team, department, or organization depends on generating new ideas and testing them. By far, the majority of innovations that organizations leverage to renew themselves are new applications or improvements of products or services they already provide to the marketplace.

Leaders who champion renewal often ask the “why” question—why are we doing things this way, why are we not attacking this from a different angle? They often approach renewal within the context of the strategic business focus of the organization, which makes the innovative efforts purposeful and critical to their future success. They celebrate creative thinking, whether it results in a failed attempt or a successful product or service. When an initiative fails, renewing leaders look for why it failed and what was learned for the next attempt. They do not punish those involved in failed initiatives. Instead, they approach renewal with determination, carried out in a humble, open, curious, and genuine manner.

Innovating leaders encourage the “wild-eyed” inventor types on the team, but also provide the structure within which renewal can occur. They engage in a process that involves some or all of the following:

- Re-engagement
- Re-examination
- Re-integration
- Re-invention

Let’s look at each of these for greater insight about what it means to be a renewing leader.

Re-engagement. In the previous article in this Leadersynth series, we discussed the importance of being a leader who en-spire. But what do you do when you take a position with a team or department that is tired and discouraged from previous leaders or failed projects? It takes a leader who can re-engage the

group. One way to do this, borrowed from a psychological discipline called Appreciative Inquiry, is to sit down with the team and use these questions to facilitate a more energized, engaged dialogue:

1. Think of a time when you were part of a highly energized, productive team. Briefly describe the situation and when it occurred in your life.
2. Now, think about what made this particular team stand out—what was it about the dynamics, the objectives, the leadership, and the other members that made it work?
3. Finally, think about our own team/department. You have three wishes for how you think this team could be improved. What are they?

Re-examination. To affect change and renew, you often need to look with new eyes at the things that surround you. Notice what the team/department is doing and how they are doing the tasks. Think about where your existing systems create bottlenecks, where processes produce redundancy or waste, or where organizational obstacles result in frustration and discouragement. Notice what your customers/clients are asking for or dealing with that your products or services could address, but do not currently. Pretend you are an anthropologist who has just been dropped into the middle of a foreign culture—what stands out about the people, the dynamics, the interactions? What needs to be changed, what could be changed?

Re-integration. Most of the renewal that occurs in organizations, the majority of the innovation, comes as the result of a re-integration. This involves the weaving together of what you already do with what you believe could be done. It builds on your continuous improvement efforts—your legacy and continuity—but also includes change points that create more dramatic shifts in your processes and products. For example, in many ways, Apple’s iPad was a smaller, faster version of the laptop, and my Samsung Note is a smaller, faster version of an iPad. Each of these steps involves a re-integration of the previous output.

Re-invention. Contrast the shift from iPad to Note, with the original laptop innovation, which took the desktop design of three separate components (PC, monitor, and keyboard), and squeezed them into one flat book that could open and close. This was a dramatic change, a re-invention in the computer industry. In some cases, the motivation is to meet customer needs that have shifted and created an altered context for your products or services, and in other cases, the motivation is to open customers’ eyes to a need that they were not even aware they had. The first smart phones are examples of this, as are the first PC’s that shifted work from the industry standard mainframe computers to your desk top.

What about you? Take stock of yourself in terms of your capacity to renew, either through your own ideas, or others on your team. In what ways are you effective at encouraging renewal in your team members? What could you do to foster and nurture more of this capacity in yourself and your team?

Keep in mind that, according to a recent Harvard Business Review article (Building a Game Changing Talent Strategy, JAN-FEB 2014), talented individuals are drawn to organizations that continually renew their systems, processes, and strategic initiatives in order to delight customers and stay ahead of competitors. What are you doing to renew and attract new talent?

We hope this sixth in a seven-part series has been helpful. Please give us your feedback, and share with us an example from your own leadership experience. We look forward to hearing from you!