

How Leaders Succeed—They Achieve!

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In our current **Leadersynth** series, we first introduced the topic of “How Leaders Succeed”, and then explained in our last two editions that leaders learn and empower others. In this fourth edition, we focus on the importance of achieving the results you promise as a leader. As a reminder, we believe that, to be a successful LEADER, it is critical that you engage consistently in each of the following behaviors:

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

Achieve. It may seem a bit elementary to include “achieve” in this series about how leaders succeed, but it is critically important to actually accomplish what you set out to do as a leader. In fact, not achieving results as promised is the second most frequent reason why 50 percent of leaders new to their positions fail. This includes leaders promoted into a new position, as well as those hired from outside the organization. Achieving results is a big deal!

In my work helping organizations like yours hire and develop their key talent, it is clear to me that achieving results is a primary motivator for the vast majority of leaders. They become energized when they are able to get results through others, and they become demotivated when people or processes get in the way of achieving their objectives. In fact, I believe this drive to achieve is one factor that helps organizations identify new, high potential leaders. Those who demonstrate a strong drive to get tasks done on time and within budget are often the ones considered most highly for promotion.

In the eyes of those on the team, “Leaders make things possible. Exceptional leaders make them inevitable.” (Lance Morrow) When leaders build a track record of consistently getting the job done, it energizes their teams and builds confidence and respect on the part of their peers and superiors in the organization. Everyone wants to be part of a winning team, and these teams are typically led by someone who knows how to get the results accomplished.

Not results at any cost, however. In an earlier Leadersynth series on “Why Leaders Fail” (available on our webpage), we noted how the number one reason leaders do not succeed in a new role is their lack of success in building and maintaining good relationships. Exceptional leaders, then, get results with the buy-in and support of their team members. They build, nurture, and leverage relationships, and then achieve results through others. They delegate effectively and follow up to make sure assignments are completed on time, as promised (see “How Leaders Succeed—They Empower!” on our webpage).

Get the result. The bottom line in delivering the results is that you accomplish what you promised, within the budget and timeline, and without losing team members or customers over how you did it. For example, several years ago, I was called in to work with the general superintendent on a major sports stadium construction project. The HR VP who contacted me indicated that this individual was a bully who threatened internal employees and external construction vendors with his aggressive language and physical demeanor. He had bailed out of a previous attempt at coaching, but he was such a high value individual that they were willing to give another coach a swing at it.

When Dan and I first met, I talked with him for about half an hour before I said to him, “this is where smart (you) meets educated (me), and we work together to shift your approach.” He was very reluctant at first, because his previous coach had told him to “just relax and don’t feel so responsible.” However, he WAS responsible, not only for getting this professional sports facility done on time and within budget to the customer’s satisfaction, but also for making sure that there were no deaths or serious injuries due to safety issues on this \$400 million build. From the first time I stepped into his temporary Quonset hut office and saw four years of huge calendars capturing major deadlines for the build, it was very clear how important it was to achieve this project on time. With a little help from me, Dan managed to complete it a month early and with no deaths or serious injuries. As he would say, he “got ‘er done!”

A more recent coaching participant of mine, Katherine, illustrates how failing to get results casts a shadow on everything you try to accomplish as a leader. She had been hired by my client, an architectural design firm, as a bright, driven leader who was a possible successor to the current president. She immediately jumped into the deep end of the organizational pool, finding major leadership holes and taking on a large number of assignments that cut across this multi-state firm. In addition, she was responsible for building new business in one geographic region, as well as championing better business development practices in the other regions. Weighed down by all these leadership tasks that she willingly took on, and running into major obstacles in trying to drive other leaders toward the changes she identified, she was simply not achieving enough results in ANY of her areas of responsibility.

The other senior leaders began to complain to each other about Katherine, and the president began to lose confidence in her ability to succeed in the organization. At this point, I was brought in to help her chart a course and an approach that might lead to short term new business results, as well as long term impact on the organization’s processes and systems. She sharpened her focus to work on the most pressing problems first, and she began to make headway in convincing others to adopt new work task processes and systems. She brought in outside consultants to help structure new business proposals. Slowly, but noticeably, the firm began to adapt to the new approaches. Just a few days ago, she sent me an email that said, “The Oak Grove hospital project has been funded, which means \$750K in new business by the end of the year. The business development model is finally working!”

Instill the results drive. Successful leaders like Dan and Katherine exhibit a strong drive toward results. They display a sense of urgency about accomplishing their goals and objectives, and they instill in others the importance of getting the job done on time and within budget. They are role models who aim toward the highest levels of performance with passion and purpose and involve others to deliver results.

We hope this fourth in a seven-part series has been helpful to you. Please give us your feedback, and share with us if you have an example from your own leadership experience that you think illustrates this successful leader component of achieving. We look forward to hearing from you!