ROSELLE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES

Helping You Select and Develop Great Leaders

How to Fill Your Company's Top 5 Leadership Gaps
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In August of this year, I spent time with Human Resource leaders from 25 global companies on the topic of assessing and developing key leaders. At one point, we identified critical leadership competencies across their organizations that were in moderate or low supply in the marketplace, as well as the most difficult to develop. These constituted their top leadership 'gaps'.

Using a model developed by Korn Ferry for their Voices 360 instrument, we identified the competencies, below, as the Top 5 Leadership Gaps across their organizations:
- **Develops talent**—helping them meet their career goals and the organization's goals
- **Values differences**—recognizing the value that different cultures and perspectives offer
- **Demonstrates self-awareness**—using feedback, reflection to gain personal insight
- **Adapts to situations**—adapting approach, demeanor to fit shifting demands, situations
- **Builds Effective Teams**—developing strong teams that apply diverse skills to achieve team goals

Notice anything that these leadership gaps have in common? They are all related to interpersonal effectiveness and Emotional Intelligence. They do not include other leadership factors like business insight, financial acumen, strategic mindset, managing execution, or driving results. They are all on the softer side of leadership competence. In fact, 35+ years of research into what causes leaders new to their roles to either succeed or fail identified the number one factor as the ability of new leaders to develop effective individual and team relationships. This same theme is clearly reflected in the top 5 gaps identified by these 25 companies.

The good news. Having read the emotional intelligence literature and worked on building these competencies in leaders for 30 years, the good news is that all of the top 5 gaps listed, above, can be greatly impacted by selective hiring practices, as well as challenging assignments and executive coaching. That is, though they are difficult to develop and in short supply, there is much you can do as an organization to build success into your selection and development systems.

What would be the Top 5 gaps in your organization? That is, what competencies are in low supply among your leaders, and have proven to be the most difficult to develop? What could you do to hire new people to fill these gaps, or develop your current leaders to fill them? Two strategies working together can fill the gaps.

Selecting new leaders. Let's start with selecting new hires from the outside. Your organization probably does a relatively good job of interviewing candidates—setting up multiple meetings with people at several levels from across the company —and ensuring that they have the relevant education and experience. However, you may not dig deeply enough into those 'top 5 leadership gaps' that affect your organization and will impact it even more for the future. Before selecting your next new leader, take these three steps:

1. **Identify desired skills.** Use a leader competency framework (perhaps you already have one that reflects your organization's values) to identify those skills and abilities that are most important to your organization's future, are in relatively low supply in your company, and are the most difficult to develop through coaching or training.
2. **Create in-depth process.** Using your desired skills from step 1, develop a multi-layered screening process that gathers accurate data on candidates. From an intentional, systematic combination of behavioral interview questions, written responses to questions, personality inventories, abilities testing, and sample work situations, look closely at the degree to which candidates have the skills you most desire in your organization.
3. **Troubleshoot the process.** Identify 2-3 current employees you believe have some or all of the desired skills and take them through the process you have developed. The goal in doing this is to determine if the process would have identified these folks as highly desirable hires. If not, tweak the process in a way that more accurately hones the most desired skill sets.

Developing existing leaders. Now, let's look at what you can do to develop people already working inside your organization. Assuming the leadership gaps your organization identifies are similar in some ways to those identified by the 25 global companies mentioned earlier, they probably mostly reflect competencies related to building and maintaining individual and team relationships, developing greater resiliency to changing situations, accepting and applying feedback, and building diverse teams.

Again, the good news is that most of these 'softer skills' are amenable to development through training and coaching. For example, when I deliver my Great Leaders workshop series or engage in individual executive coaching, I am mostly working within a curriculum that develops muscles in these soft skill areas. The process of creating positive change usually involves these three steps:

1. **Provide accurate feedback.** Typically, leaders at all levels receive little to no in-depth feedback on their level of skill across a core set of competencies. Oh, there might be some perspective shared at annual performance reviews, but this usually is not enough to actually create behavioral change. On the other hand, using a 360 degree feedback instrument, like my FULLVIEW Feedback Inventory, or the Voices instrument previously mentioned, is a very powerful way to build insight and perspective. It also injects a shot of motivation to change the negative perspectives reflected in the developmental needs sections of such reports. In many cases, just receiving accurate, in-depth, unbiased perspective on how they're being perceived is enough to change a leader's behavior.
2. **Build desired skills.** Use a combination of on-the-job learning that involves assignment to tasks and responsibilities designed to stretch and build muscle in the desired skillset. Arrange an internal mentor who can provide additional perspective, or hire an outside coach who can help the individual work in-depth on new skills, as well as on the internal obstacles within the leader that stop him/her from growing these new skills. Use classroom or online training available inside and outside the organization to help cement these new skills.
3. **Give follow-on feedback on progress.** Use informal feedback from the coach or mentor, from key stakeholders, and from others to ensure that progress is being made toward the desired skill set. Make sure the individual continues to be motivated to build the skills and complete the course of work required to get there.

Bottom line. Every organization has leadership skills gaps, and some of these are very difficult to fill.

Using a combination of selective hiring and intentional development can mitigate the impact of gaps.