From Dean's Desk:

Our last article addressed Servant Leadership, this article explores a systemic issue of overall quality of leadership, not only nationally, but also globally, and then suggests some ideas of how to fill the void or close the gap. As most of you know, we have been very critical of what we refer to as the 'Elixir of Leadership.' Do as I say and you too can and will be a good leader. Follow my 14 steps, practice my 8 principles, etc etc. the list goes on and on. With the studies and research we relied on, it is apparent that the Elixir is not as magical as the gurus would like us all to believe. There is a school of thought that the sequence in advancing an idea is to first understand the Why, then the How and finally the What. Historically the sequence is backwards—starting with the What and then the How. This article turns things around a bit. We suggest that the Why and How of leadership development needs to precede the What. First is Why; why is leadership important, what is the business case? How can our leaders become better and then What do they have to do differently. What we are really saying is that leadership development programs must be reevaluated and not so much from a content perspective, but from a syntax, context and methods perspective. Please read on and we believe our ideas have merit and can help in filling the leadership void.

Why is there a leadership void, and what can be done about it? We have some ideas!

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Introduction

Throughout our 25 years of writing UPDATE, many of the articles focused on the topic of leadership. Our premise is simple, we believe (and as most studies and analysis support) that the quality of leadership is declining (See our UPDATE Volume 5 Issue 4 "Loss of Instinct – That Good Old Gut Feeling"). Our concern is that significant effort and countless resources are being committed to address this deficiency, and by conventional and even non-conventional performance measures, those efforts are not producing positive results.

Our goal is to not only raise awareness of the need for effective leaders in our businesses, our governments, our non-profits and other aspects of our everyday lives, but to explore the reasons for the deficiency as well as examine new and innovative methods of improving leadership development programs. Toward that goal, we have looked at topics like the loss of instinctual leaders, the loss of the art of observation, the overdependence on numbers and statistics, narcissistic leaders, and inherent pessimism.

Whether in business, government, non-profits or in the religious world we frequently read about failures of Leadership. The subject of Leadership, no matter how much is addressed, remains, as it always has been, a problem. The leadership problem manifests itself in many ways. It may be the corporate executive whose terrible decisions create disasters for his or her company. The Governor who lies about his whereabouts so he can jet off to his "soul mate." Or a religious leader whose behavior is 180 degrees opposed to what he espouses.

To complicate the issue, the impact of the recession of the past several years on our nation and society amplifies the need for strong effective leaders who inspire confidence. Yet if the studies and research and our observations are true, we face a widening leadership void. Yes, we have "leaders" in title, but are they effective? Are they inspiring us to overcome difficult times and grow our economy and our businesses? Do they demonstrate the values and ethics that will ensure long-term success? Do they "walk the talk" and con-

stantly demonstrate that they want success not just for their businesses but also for the communities in which they work? Do they care about their businesses, their employees and their communities more than their own personal success and paychecks?

Why does this leadership gap seem to be endless? Why do we continue to fill key positions with people who are either not qualified or who prove to be incapable of performing at the level expected of them in their lofty positions? Do we expect too much of our leaders? Should the performance expectations be lowered? Are there good leaders out there? I think we would be remiss to say no, there are great examples of leadership; the question is how to get the others to believe, change and/or learn more effectively using great leaders as role models?

Undoubtedly, we could pose hundreds of questions about why the state of leadership does not improve, but the results are real. In two recent articles a Harvard University survey showed that 75% of Americans feel there is a leadership crisis in the country, and a study by Development Dimensions International (DDI), discussed in another of our recent articles, showed a very bleak view of the performance of and confidence in leaders, not only in the U.S. but worldwide. Why is this issue of leadership quality so evasive and difficult to focus in on and rectify?

On the other side of this issue, we have a succession of "gurus", who for years have espoused wisdom on how to become a better and more effective leader. This myriad of books, videos and seminars brought the gurus a lot of notoriety and money with minimal to no long-term lasting leadership improvement; on the contrary, the opposite based on reported results. Each quickly became the flavor of the month soon to be replaced on the bestseller list by the next guru. To be fair, many of these gurus did present good information and good methodologies but alas, the studies and analyses speak for themselves, and the results are marginal.

Leadership Development Programs
Our goal in this article is to try to identify how to respond to this leadership void and regain focus in a positive direction. Toward this goal, we began examining the various components of typical Leadership Development Programs (including those we have been part of in the past) and realized there are both content and methodology issues that are most probably influencing the overall success of how existing leadership development programs are designed and administered.

Can a one-week seminar or workshop really yield leadership development? Are these really the way to teach leadership?

Even the most effective leadership development workshop still ends with the participants going back into their old environment without a strong support system and without complete commitment from the executive levels. Typically, senior executives select high performing individuals to participate in leadership development programs. The question becomes, are these high performance highly motivated individuals being set-up for failure with our current design of leadership development? In our experience we have seen, too often, that attending leadership development programs is viewed by senior executives as a reward and a checkmark that their subordinates must complete on the way up a ladder into an established environment where change is truly not expected nor welcomed.

In a recent book titled *Leadership Pipeline* – the author's (name?) first statement in the introduction is "This is an era in which the demand for leadership greatly exceeds the supply. Signs of this imbalance are everywhere. Almost every issue of The Wall St. Journal carries news about a major corporation bringing in a top executive from outside the organization. Executive search firms are flourishing because of the demand for leadership talent." This demand for the search firms appears to be confirmation that grooming and leadership development within companies is either a failure or non-existent.

The problem is more complex than just the need for leadership development and grooming. In our opinion, leaders and senior executive across the wide spectrum of organizations must recognize and understand that leadership development is not a quick fix, one-day seminar or one-week workshop. What we think about is how can we make a drastic change and/or significantly impact leadership development to fill the void?

Examining conventional Leadership Development Programs (LDP), the content is well defined. Just about every well-developed LDP has the same or similar components. Myers Briggs, Conflict Management, Presentation Skills, etc. etc. In addition, for the most part, these programs are administered in very conventional ways. There usually is a combination of formal presentations (as we call them, 'talking heads'), intermixed with team activities or experiential learning and other workshop related activities. When it is all over, everyone goes home and as much as we try to bring what we learn to the workplace, those learnings wane and the organization returns to business as usual. Perhaps it is not totally fair to be so critical and negative; we have done the same thing. We also realize that the outcomes produce some positive impact, but in reality, dramatic results are rare. The irony is dramatic results usually come from harsh actions taken

when things become extreme and pressures are high to make changes. Too frequently these situations take the "slash and burn" approach where those slashing and burning eliminate good talent and processes along with the bad. In effect, many of those things that made a company successful or good at one time are tossed out along with the malaise that infected the organization. The resulting problem is the damage done is worse than the benefit, leaving deep wounds. So is there an answer to this dilemma? Is there a better way? Why is it that so little benefit is realized from conventional LDP, or how is it many "slash and burn" situations could be avoided?

We suggest that conducting such an analysis would be a long-term initiative typically not acceptable to business people. Where we are going with this is rooted in Kirkpatrick's levels of learning:
  1 – reaction
  2 – learning
  3 – relating learning to the workplace
  4 – achieving business results

Numbers three and four are the crux of the issue – ultimately there has to be a business result or the time and expense of the program becomes valueless. Far too frequently, LDP is not related to the specific issues in a workplace. An LDP can be directly tied to a specific workplace, but that requires those in leadership positions to understand existing and historical issues and as well as acknowledge that there are such issues. Culturally, going through an LDP and returning to business as usual creates an attitude of apathy: with every new initiative, all employees have to do is wait it out and things will settle down – back to business as usual. There comes an attitude of "this too shall pass", diminishing overall abilities to make any changes or improvements. A close corollary is the too-frequent situation where good ideas come from LDP but there is no support from upper management for incorporating those ideas and again "this too shall pass". Sounds grim, but the statistics seem to bear this out.

We do believe that while content may need to be revisited, introspection and interactive human skills training are essential components of leadership development. What we believe requires the most examination is Context and Methods. When we conduct LDP sessions, we do have a program plan and sequence of instruction, but we do not become slaves to it. If the session goes a different path, we accommodate that as long as it is constructive. After examining these digressions, we have seen, on the part of the

participants, a desire to interact and address issues that are directly pertinent to them and their work. With this awareness, the facilitation role becomes more robust, and the experience and knowledge of the facilitator become more important. The challenge then becomes how to channel this energy of the group into a productive outcome that has some traction in the real workplace after the session. Therefore, we have several dynamics going on at once.

Ideas for Changing LDP
Let us examine some ideas. The majority of our LDP efforts have been with the senior individuals of organizations, so we will start there with this discussion. Several years ago, it was acceptable to take 12 to 15 senior executives to a two to three day retreat and immerse them into a leadership session. We were always considerate of their work responsibilities so we had frequent breaks that provided for contacting their people and addressing work-related issues. After three days, the group would disperse, and although we assigned homework in hopes of keeping them engaged between these sessions, the day-today demands overshadowed their LDP work. The group would reconvene in three months and the process repeated with new topics of course. After each session, we did the conventional collection of attendee feedback. This follow-up process worked quite well, except we did not have a way to determine the Kirkpatrick Level III and IV outcomes. We did solicit informal feedback from attendees on changes they may have experienced in their respective workplaces, and we conducted overall organizational culture surveys, all of which were trending positive. The issue here is what is the real ROI on such an expensive program? When we refer to expense, it is not the expense of the instructional/facilitation team, venue, food, etc., because those costs pale in light of the cost of 15 highly paid senior executives secluded for three days. The other consideration, as technology affects all of us, is the Smart Phone, so not only can people be contacted via conventional telephone, but email and text messaging become another level of distraction. While ground rules preclude using their phones during the session, break times are consumed with responding to these various forms of communication. It doesn't stop there; when the group reconvenes, many of the attendees' minds are elsewhere, rather than on the LDP session material. What is the impact of all these factors?

The impact is that we must change the methods of instruction. When a group is together, their time needs to be high octane, high impact, and high value-added for them and for their organization. The distractions will never go away, but the session design has to be so engaging that even with distractions,

the group stays engaged and realizes a significant value. So when and where is the content learning taking place? The design of the instructional sequence has to focus on self-study, interaction between sessions with the facilitation team, and interactive instructional materials. Many years ago, we were deeply involved in designing and developing computer-based training (CBT) instructional materials. The real value to CBT was the throughput of trainees. The context was nuclear power plant outage training. Outage workers needed to fulfill very specific training before beginning work, and this training had to be documented and tested. At that time conventional stand-up instructor led training was time consuming and expensive. Most of these workers were veteran outage workers, so the amount 'new' material was minimal. As a result, CBT proved to be a vast improvement in trainee throughput, represented the most effectively measured benefit to the utility. The dollar savings were significant.

Advancing 15 years and applying similar thinking to leadership development, we will examine how a new way of thinking about LDP instructional methodology will improve the outcomes and performance of those participating in these programs. We make the following suggestions specific to change the approach to Leadership Development Programs to make them more meaningful and more effective. An approach such as we are presenting would have to have complete support from senior management so the participants would know that it is not a task to be done "if there is time".

Self-Study Modules
The actual content of leadership programs, if well designed, would be developed as self-study modules so those participating in the LDP can prepare for each session by completing the self-study module in advance. Each module's design would include interactive elements that make the lesson engaging and interesting, thereby enhancing learning. At the end of the lesson, a screen would suggest topics to be discussed within their LDP group, as well as afford the individual the opportunity to present/discuss unique issues they would like to include in the group discussion. A time-frame for completion would be established to ensure that everyday work pressures would not push the self-study to the side.

Group Sessions
The advantage of a group of people sitting in a room is certainly not having them stare at a screen with words projected on it, and a talking head regurgitating those words. Based on the overall scheduling of the LDP, when the group completes the self-study module, a live group discussion session is held. The focus of this group session is on topics specific to their

organization, specifically a project or an issue they are with individually or collectively involved in as related to the self-study lesson. Initially the group sessions should be facilitated to ensure the group can learn to stay on topic and to engage the entire group. This will also give the facilitator a way to measure participation in the program and to intervene if necessary. The discussion groups may well identify related topics that can be pursued in the group session or scheduled for future modules.

Forum
The Forum is a method to keep the momentum of the interactive session going and to afford attendees an opportunity to ask questions, solicit advice or present a situation with which they may need assistance in an anonymous context. The Forum would be a "log-in" discussion forum for either those attending a workshop or a designated group of leadership attendees. Feedback could be from anyone who has login access to a particular Forum. The originator of a post could also solicit inputs from instructors/facilitators as well as colleagues who were in their workshop. The goal here is to keep the discussion and dialogue going between more formalized live sessions. The Forum also affords an opportunity for those who are reluctant to ask questions in live sessions to do so via the Forum. As with any instructional method, the method may be more applicable to certain audiences than others, but that is the responsibility of the designer. Once a database of issues and responses is created, the Forum becomes more valuable, because it can then become a resource for future LDP attendees to review historical responses to similar or the same issues as well as being able to interact with their colleagues and fellow attendees.

Other Things That Need to Happen
Using a drastically different approach to LDP is a big step in addressing the leadership void. However, other things must happen to start to establish future leaders and leadership bench strength. The items below are all interrelated and closely mesh with each other and should be viewed as a set and not a "pick one of the above". Some of these will sound like old ideas or simply common sense but they have not been done with rigor and have not been done effectively.

- Identify high potential people - This is not a new idea and has been the subject of some corporate programs. It does not take a special program. Instead, it takes managers spending time observing performance beyond the annual performance review. How do people relate to the people above, around and below them. Do they suggest new ideas? Do they lead informal groups? Do they stand out

among their peers in positive ways? Managers must "get out of the weeds" to learn more about the people working for them.

- Provide possible high performers challenging assignments. Help people stretch themselves even if they may be a little reluctant. Frequently, there are people who cannot see themselves as potential leaders it is in the best interest of the organization and the individual to develop those skills whenever possible. The challenging assignments do not always have to be high profile but they need to provide a challenge. The manager needs to be there to provide support and guidance when sought.

- Allow growth through independent thinking and by occasionally making mistakes. Leaders need to be able to look at different ways of viewing a problem and need to show creative approaches. Not all of those will be successful but they should all be learning experiences and help the individual grow. Be there to coach and review results and yes, mistakes.

- We feel one of the most important things high potential people need is mentoring. It may feel like showing favoritism but it is essential to your future success. When we started in the management world, some wise person taught us that our first job as a supervisor or manager was to groom our successor. Without a successor how could we grow? Unfortunately, today we have too many supervisors and managers who are more interested in protecting their turf and view information as power rather than something to be shared. Some of the proudest moments for us were to think of the people we mentored who went on to be successful leaders.

- Senior leaders must embrace change and empower their LDP graduates to use the lessons learned in their LDP classes to their workplace.

Finally, define performance measures and ROI in a very **specific** context of the organization. This is best accomplished with the LDP attendees and senior management in a joint facilitated session. This provides a target and ensures consistent understanding and agreement of that target.

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Conclusion

This article explores a decline in leadership both nationally and internationally. We draw upon the research of reliable and prestigious institutions to come to our conclusions. We further explored Leadership Development Programs, and the reasons why their impact has not throttled this decline, and dissected these programs into content, method and organizational culture. We feel content is relatively consistent and contains necessary skill and knowledge topics associated with leadership with one caveat: a conventional tool of job and task analysis has not been done to verify our belief. The danger of such an analysis is the job specific skills and knowledge makes it very difficult to generalize for leadership development. Therefore, assuming the actual leadership skills and knowledge will be learned with existing conventional content, and that content can be tailored to specific audiences, we move to method.

This area is where we see opportunity. The conventional instructional methods of leadership development programs must be revamped to meet the needs of high performing executives and managers in a fast paced demanding work environment. We have suggested a model that we feel meets these needs.

However, even with a tailored curriculum and an enlightened instructional strategy, without a corporate culture that embraces the learning in a job-related context, there can be no ROI. For this reason, before a LDP program is embarked upon, the senior leadership of an organization must completely support and endorse the program, and communicate with the organization that change is coming. There must be a dialogue between the LDP participants and senior leadership to ensure consistent messages and expectations are realized. In addition, this group must look back, assess their outcomes, and ensure they are realizing the expected results. There is risk involved for all parties involved, but nothing of value will result unless a prudent risk is taken and leaders are allowed to apply their skills, attributes and experience in the workplace.

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