

Cultivating Next-Generation Leadership *Six Keys to Successful Preparation*

Why is it critical to develop our up and coming leaders? What kind of leaders do we need for the future? Who will our future leaders be? How will we make sure they are prepared? When should we invest in developing emerging leaders?

Why is it important?

There are big changes coming and somehow we need to anticipate them and do our best to be prepared. The most obvious shift is the pending retirement of the baby boomer generation. **76 Million strong, the boomers will again be shaking things up just by sheer numbers. The next generation, numbers about 46 million.** The implications of this are many, but one that stands out is that to replace current leadership, we will have to reach deeper into the pool of the next generation. Most likely leaders will be promoted at younger ages than in the past and there will be more diversity in next-generation leaders. These factors demand new ways of thinking about leadership and leadership preparation.

Those looking at global perspectives tell us that the world is becoming flatter and there is shifting going on in power and economics. The exciting part is that those who have been shut out in the past will have increasing access to new economic and political opportunities. New superpowers appear to be emerging. That may be frightening to those of us who currently hold most of the advantages. The bar is being raised and we need to be up to the challenge. **Leaders will need a more global perspective and will be in charge of a more diverse and globally dispersed workforce.** Power and authority will need to be negotiated in new ways to deal with the new economy.

Our world seems to be groaning under the weight of our current systems; social, political, economic, and religious, to name a few. Ervin Laszlo, prolific author and founder of systems philosophy, states: “We have arrived at a watershed in history. The world we have created is no longer sustainable: it will either change, or break-down.” He goes on to say that the way beyond today’s crisis lies in profound and radical transformation. This view is supported by the World Wisdom Council, which states we are facing a planetary spiritual crisis because of global climate change, economic inequities, and religious intolerance. **They have issued a call for deep changes in human awareness, thinking, values, and responsibility.**

What kind of leaders will we need to meet these challenges?

Certainly we will need leaders with high capacities, maturity, courage, and skill in navigating transitions. William Bridges notes: “Times of transition are becoming the rule rather than the exception. Yet few leaders know how to prepare for the changes that lie ahead.”

Maturity is rather subjective and hard to define, yet we seem to recognize it when we see it. The hallmarks of maturity can be demonstrated on at least four dimensions:

- The ability to maintain good emotional control and awareness.
- Using good judgment in our behavioral choices
- Advanced cognitive skills, such as systemic, strategic, relativistic, and dualistic thinking
- Spiritual consciousness of our inter-connectivity, high moral values, imagination, and creativity.

Nancy Roof, President of Kosmos Associates, an organization dedicated to inspiring individual and collective participation in shaping our global future, states: “We need leaders with a global vision who can design enabling environments that foster a natural change process.” In order to help our emerging leaders deal with all the complexity, new models of leadership will have to evolve. No one will be able to manage it all, so we will need models of shared power, authority, and expertise. We will need models for leading a multi-generational workforce. We will need models that address multiple perspectives from diverse cultures in a globalized world.

How should we be building up our leadership bench strength?

One way to approach this question is to realize that the characteristics and qualities such as maturity and capacity are a function of both innate potential and development. The issue of innate potential speaks to the need for assessment and identification of high potential leaders. This will be addressed in more detail later. Looking at leadership through a developmental lens has several advantages. First, we will be less judgmental of others if we recognize that we are all on a developmental journey and we are where we are. Secondly, if we understand how people learn and develop, this lens offers some guidance as to where we should focus our time and money.

Development occurs both individually and collectively. In other words, we experience development within our selves, our organizations, our communities, our society, and our world. Development on one level effects development on other levels interactively. Thus within organizations, it is wise to pay attention to development of both the individuals and the culture and environment in which they operate.

What are the things we have learned about how people develop?

- **Development takes time.** Not only chronological time but learning time. Learning requires the ability and willingness to reflect on our experience and integrate the information into what we already know.
- **We need to step out of the wind for periods of time.** This means finding ways to retreat from the storms, to reflect on experiences, reflect on feelings, on goals, and priorities. Sometimes it means having dialogue with others or taking in perspectives from other sources.
- **Getting to know oneself is critical to development.** Self-knowledge includes elements such as strengths, limitations, values, assumption, and core motivators. Self awareness is somewhat different and is the ability to be in tune with what’s

going on inside of us at any given moment, to know what's driving us and coloring our perceptions.

- **Development is most effective when focused on strengths.** According to research by the Gallup organization, each person's talents are enduring and unique, and the greatest room for growth is in the areas of his or her greatest strengths.
- **Development needs community.** It is very hard for people to develop without the challenge and support of others. One might be able to hone intellectual skills in isolation to some degree, but maturity is a relational concept and needs the collaboration of other people.
- **Development can be fostered and accelerated within an enabling environment.** Not an environment that enables weakness or negative habits, but one that stretches, encourages, provides feedback, allows mistakes, and celebrates growth and success.

There are many implications of what we know about development and unfortunately these are often ignored. Training and development efforts too often focus on filling in the gaps and end up forcing people to try to work against their natural grains. We also try to rush people along and submerge them in programs that give them information overload. Development programs need to be designed in harmony with how we are programmed to learn and grow, and need to be supported by practices and cultures that facilitate the growth that is desired.

Who will our future leaders be and how can we identify them?

Too often people rely on gut instinct and personal judgment when assessing potential leaders. Here are some critical factors to consider that are more objective:

- **Skills and experience.** What are the required skills and experience for the leadership position in question and how do these match with the possible candidates?
- **Current and past performance.** This can be misleading if there is a transition from management or technical skills to leadership. Past performance alone may or may not be an indicator of future performance in a new role. It should be weighted in conjunction with the other factors.
- **Capacity and talent.** Personal observations and 360 assessments can provide useful data to assess capacity and talent. Using a validated instrument such as *The Gallup Leadership Assessment* or *The Leadership Development Profile* will provide additional objective data of leadership potential.
- **Motivation.** A strong and natural desire for leadership is important because motivation predicts behavior. An instrument such as the *Reiss Desire Profile* can increase understanding of the core strivings of potential leaders and how those strivings will influence the type of leader the individual will be.

Summary: Six keys for developing emerging leaders

1. Assess organizational leadership needs and readiness.

Don't leave succession planning to chance. Creating a comprehensive list or matrix of leadership needs for the next 5 to 10 years will serve as the roadmap of where you need to be in leadership strength. Do you have a culture that supports and enables development, with advancement opportunities, recognition of achievement, mentoring, and coaching?

2. Assess your pipeline.

As you look at the high potential leaders in your organization, how do they match up with the leadership needs on your matrix? This will tell you what you need in terms of recruitment and development.

3. Assess the individuals within your pipeline.

Be systematic about assessing potential, using not only performance history, but also validated instruments such as 360 assessments and instruments that measure capacity.

4. Use a developmental framework to build bench strength.

Recognize that maturity and capability take time to develop. Provide challenging and broad experiences for people in your pipeline, along with opportunities to process and extract maximum learning from those experiences.

5. Invest in theoretically sound development programs.

There are hundreds of approaches to leadership development. Don't fall for slick presentations at the expense of effectiveness. Look for programs that focus on building upon strengths and core motivations, provide information in manageable chunks, allow people time to process and integrate learning, and incorporate learning into real, on-the-job applications.

6. The time to invest in the future is now.

As you take a systematic and sound approach to leadership development, it becomes obvious that you cannot wait until you have vacancies to fill and then expect emerging leaders to step up and succeed. Leadership development needs to be a continuous process that is integrated into the very culture of the organization.

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