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LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT WITH A DIFFERENCE

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The modern day worker cannot be deceived with promises of quick and easy solutions and a perfect world. The challenges we face at work are multidimensional. They often have high level technical complexity whilst demanding emotional involvement at the same time. In addition, modern day life is fast-paced with relentless waves of change. In such a world, the quality of our work and our progress is more dependent on the ability to respond effectively to situations than it is to simply comply with rules, regulations and standards. And following certain theories with little practical understanding of *how* to get the job done is also fast becoming unfashionable with very little -- if any -- meaningful value. Moreover, the accumulation of knowledge and qualifications are not the only prerequisites required to meet these challenges. Rather, the ability to assess and interpret situations with deep insight by using multiple perspectives and a systemic view is key. Equally important is the regard for relationships of all kinds, and knowing how to preserve them. Great leaders know how to balance the necessary regulations of good governance and accountability, with the creativity and skill to optimize opportunities that unlock their full potential.

Developing leaders

The above factors have a significant impact on the type of leader that is needed in business, as well as the methodology which is used to develop such leaders. The requirement to respond in quick time but with a long term and holistic view demands leadership skill and ability at all levels of an organisation. It therefore has to be in the vision of the leaders with the highest responsibility for the organisation to strategically build the leadership of all its employees.

*"The mediocre teacher tells.
The good teacher explains.
The superior teacher
demonstrates. The great
teacher inspires."*

William Arthur Ward

The modern leader is characterised more by his insight, resolve and ability to 'read' people and situations well than it is by his knowledge or charisma. The development of a leader is therefore neither determined by nature (personality) nor by study and classroom training. The focus in developing a leader has to be more experiential, learning from feedback and reflecting on inner as well as team dynamics.

Developing and building leaders should not be seen, neither be treated as an event. Instead the development of leaders is a process which is typically not classroom training, but hands-on coaching. Developing good leaders is also not a theoretical application which is done in isolation, but rather a continuous set of practical experiences which is applied in a team context. Such development of leaders must be done in a responsive manner which meets specific and immediate challenges - it is intensive, personal and must be outcomes focused.

Outcomes

A leadership development initiative will only have real and lasting outcomes if the process ensures the internalisation of new knowledge (i.e. the leader functions with new insight in what is more effective and beneficial) with regards to leading himself and leading others.

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The first of three main areas for development is *giving direction*. Competencies that enhances the ability to give direction are visionary, analytical, systemic and strategic thinking, organisational awareness, decisiveness, assertiveness and persuasiveness.

The second area is *being an example to follow*. It pertains to character, integrity, courage and personal mastery. The competencies needed to demonstrate high quality personal leadership are self awareness, self motivation, self regard, self initiative, consistency, perseverance, results orientation and work /life integration.

The third area is *building a team*. It pertains to the leader's ability to create an environment of care, inspiration, discipline and wisdom. Competencies that enhance the ability to build good leadership teams are trustworthiness, empathy, listening, conflict handling, diversity/cultural sensitivity, support building and interpersonal impact.

Lifelong learning

Real leaders are not those who had one success story and then try to repeat it over and over again with nothing new to add. They are not those who sit back, fold their arms and declare that there is nothing left for them to learn - nothing of importance at least. To the contrary, real leaders are those people who over a lifetime were able to adjust and find new ways of applying themselves; new wisdom to go forward with, as well as new inspiration to overcome the challenges.

Indeed, as JF Kennedy realised, leadership and learning are indispensable to each other. Not only is the 'know it all' attitude a sign of lacking leadership, but learning in itself is a process of leading. The word 'leadership' implies the risk of going first. It implies new territory. It implies change. It implies learning. Indeed, investment in the development of leaders that is fitting for the times we live in is worth more than any other investment.

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