

# Creating a Culture of Leadership

Many organizational managers assume that by adding leadership training or a leadership development program that they are able to create a culture that accepts leadership. The move from non-existent leadership to a leadership culture takes time – and a few steps in between. Let's look at how you can create a culture of leadership.

First, you, as the organizational leader, must acknowledge the existence of leadership potential. It sounds simple, but many leaders do not want to admit that they are replaceable – that someone or more than one person would be capable of taking the reins once they're gone. Don't be that leader – seek out and recognize that the organization has talent. Acknowledge that the talent will one day be capable of taking over your vision and moving the organization forward. By making this acknowledgment, you're telling your mid- and senior-level leaders that a path exists. And you're telling new hires that the sky is the limit in your organization.

Next, clearly outline what a leader in your organization “looks like” – and hold people to the standard. The list of leadership competencies is a long one. You'll never find one leader who executes all competencies perfectly. So, you must determine the competencies that mesh well with your organization and its climate. Don't forget to decide which competencies lend themselves to your vision for the organization and where you see the organization in the future – even after you've gone.

You should also consider the functional leadership competencies that go along with your organization's line of business. If you choose too widely, you'll end up with a picture of a leader who doesn't exist. Once you've determined the competencies, lay them out for the organization. Simply put, you can say that a leader in your organization has these competencies and displays these behaviors. As people move into leadership roles, hold them to the standard.

We've already mentioned the fact that organizations do create leadership training and development programs – and you should do that to build a leadership culture. The program should be ongoing and consist of various levels – from “beginning” leadership to the advanced. In fact, your leadership program should begin reaching down into the lowest levels of the organization right away. For example, offer a leadership program to new-hires that details what your leader “looks like”. It's the seed that will keep leadership growing through all levels.

Your program should include seminars, networking, and even real-time project management at the higher levels. By creating a multi-level program, you're keeping the leadership machinery in motion – and giving the organization a sense that anyone can move up to the leadership ranks.

Now that you've got your program, put your mid- and senior-level leaders through the program. You should even include yourself. This way, the message goes out loud and clear that your organization expects the same standard of leadership from everyone – executives included. Any cultural shift should start from the top. If they don't buy in, how do you expect the lower levels to buy in? It may be an unpopular decision with your executive team, but you'll be taking big strides in creating the culture of leadership.

At this point, it's important to explain why you're making the shift to leadership. The explanation shouldn't just be afforded to executives and managers but to all levels of the organization. Explain that you're looking to give everyone an opportunity to advance – and to learn what it takes to do so. Outline the fact that you're looking for bench strength for all leadership positions – including your own. Not only this, a leadership orientation prepares you for succession planning at all levels, as well as talent management. The benefits to the organization are numerous and it's your job to explain them.

Finally, focus on the success of the program. When you have a successful advancement due to the leadership program, highlight it publicly. Or, let's say one of your leadership teams “in training” solve a business problem in their project assignment. Showcase this development as related to the culture of leadership at your organization. When the members of your organization see that the program and its culture are successful, you'll have no trouble keeping your talent pipeline full.

There are many ways to move to a leadership culture. Follow these steps in the beginning and you'll find that the transition is simple and beneficial.

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