



Getting Employees Ready to Succeed

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How many times have you used the phrase, “Are you ready?” to motivate someone to get moving on a task or project; and similarly, how often have those same words been directed toward you? Author Simon Sinek states that,

“A leader's job is not to do the work for others, it is to help others figure out how to do it themselves, to get things done, and to succeed beyond what they thought possible.”

That job description makes a lot of sense, but truth be told, it's a little scary too. Why? Because if any part of this is missing from our own action plan to lead, the chances are pretty good that our work team won't be ready *when we need them to be at their best*. Since most of us would agree that we need employees to be –and do – their best every day, the question becomes, how can we help employees get ready to succeed individually, and together as a team?

Just a little over a year ago, the Corporate Executive Board (CEB), an international business advisory group, analyzed some 20,000 employees representing more than 40 organizations to pinpoint the challenges that are facing work teams today. The CEB found that high performers are scarce in the current workforce and that many employees lack skills to achieve their employers' desired outcomes. CEB's research resulted in the identification of 10 critical development areas that employees and organizations should concentrate on to build bench strength.

According to the CEB, to get employees ready to become high-achieving workplace contributors, organizations need to help their employees:

1. Prioritize effectively
2. Work well in team environments
3. Understand how the organization works and what it does
4. Problem solve
5. Be self-aware
6. Think proactively
7. Influence others
8. Make sound decisions
9. Learn quickly
10. Be technically savvy

This is a good list, especially when you consider the speed with which organizations need to respond to challenges, and the dwindling number of employees many organizations have now.

But when you're the leader, and it's your job to help employees grow, it's not easy to make all the pieces fit. While training is essential, all the eggs can't be placed in just one basket.

So, what can you as the leader do on a regular basis to get your team ready to become more self-sufficient, grow in their job, and increase their value to the organization?

If you're stuck for a good answer, here are some things to consider that will cover each of the CEB's Top 10...and more.

Go fish! I think all of us have overheard this universal phrase spoken by an employee at least once: *“I'm not sure what to do. Let me get my manager.”* Now, sometimes, that's the right thing to do – but if you're the one always solving the problems, you aren't really helping your employees *learn how to fish* on their own.

Instead, encourage employees to identify potential solutions to problems before they bring them to you. And if it's not the right solution, don't discount their attempt. Ask them to explain their solution and the processes (thinking) they used to arrive at it. If they missed something important in their thinking, constructively point it out. The more they get accustomed to thinking through problems and issues, the better they will become at making decisions and problem solving on their own in the future.

Build collaboration. Find ways to get employees out of their work spaces to interact with others, share ideas and occasionally *compromise* on key work issues. We all need to become adept at working with others to accomplish things.

Just like when we were kids...if we don't learn how to play with others and share our toys, we're never going to navigate the complexities of being part of something more than ourselves. And if we can't do that, it will impede our efforts in nearly everything else we try to do.

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Embrace change. *Agility* and *adaptability* are two words that need to be part of every employee's vocabulary. Because change is all around us, employees need to understand – and use technological advances and business best practices to their advantage.

Make sure you are a conduit for this type of information, and not a stopping point. Send employees to training to keep their skill set up-to-date, and use other informational channels to help them stay ahead of the curve. Model these behaviors yourself by talking about them in team meetings, in one-on-one conversations; and by engaging others in discussions about new and better ways to do “old” things.

Make employees “stock holders.” We want employees to take ownership of their work, and help move things forward after we're gone, but to do that, they need to be armed with information that will bring the big picture into focus.

For instance, do employees know how their work contributes to the bottom line? Could they give someone the “1-minute elevator speech” on why their work is so important to the organization? Do they know what factors control the department budget? Do they even know you have a budget? Do you ask for their input on how money could be used more efficiently? Do they understand the “political” reasons that often determine why things happen the way they do? Keep these things in mind when you're talking to your team about their work – and their future. Their answers might surprise you.

Speak-up! What are you doing with your poor communicators? Do you find yourself keeping them away from customers by giving them things to do that don't require much communication?

To help employees become better at influencing others and “selling” the merits of the organization, they need to communicate effectively – and with conviction – in their daily interactions with others.

Help to develop this skill by including them (slowly at first) in business meetings and events, and providing training to help bolster their confidence. And, if you're able, consider partnering them up with a mentor or “coach” who can work with them one-on-one to point out specific ways to strengthen their communication muscle.

Find the needle in the haystack. Remember the old story about the plumber who charged \$1000 to detect and fix a leak in a long length of pipe. When asked to justify his bill, he sent back a simple reply: \$1 to fix the leak; and \$999 for knowing where to look. That's called knowledge my friends.

Don't be afraid to let your team in on some of the “secrets” that affect how things work. Give them access to data and other information that doesn't need to be confidential. Let them help you analyze reports, and find problems with work processes. Get them involved!

Imagine that! Finally, as a leader, perhaps one of the most important things you can do is to give employees the chance to embrace their curiosity and imagination. Have you ever heard the saying, “Keep doing what you've always done and you'll always get what you've always got?” Encourage employees to “shake things up,” experiment (within reason) and make stretch goals for themselves that may occasionally take them out of their comfort zone.

There's some work here, to be sure. The good news is that all of these things cross-pollinate. You can't do one without developing and strengthening the others.

So get ready. Get set...and go!

Find more interesting articles and tips on leading others in the Center for Management and Professional Development's *Solutions* e-magazine.



Allan Forbis is the Director of the State of Missouri's **Center for Management and Professional Development** within the Office of Administration's Division of Personnel. Through the Center, his team of training consultants provide a variety of training solutions that help public and private employers see first-hand what happens when they work together to provide direction, awareness and focus for employees. They succeed by providing strategies for managing the performance of the people that make success a reality.

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