
OSI View

Brief Overview of
Contemporary Business Topics

Special: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Power of a Development Plan



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Human Resources Planning Society
OSI Polaris® Competency Model Development Guide

Like all goals, personal growth objectives are both intellectual and emotive. To paraphrase an old adage “*the road to ruin is paved with good intentions*” (can be just an intellectual exercise). It follows then that the road to success is paved with true *commitment* (an emotion) to energize the behavior necessary to realize intent.

This evident observation received a boost when the Corporate Leadership Council conducted research examining 17 different leadership interventions and identified the two most impactful:

1. The amount of decision making authority given the developing individual, and
2. The existence of an INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Intuitively, we can see why both are important. A development plan that is dictated by a boss or other authority lacks the personal commitment needed, especially in the face of challenging growth goals. And a goal without a specific plan ends up being just a dream. It takes specificity and discipline, combined with commitment, to realize goals.

Preconditions to Development

A recent example from a failed leadership developmental plan highlights two absolutely essential personal preconditions to successful development.

In the case in point, the CEO of a mid-size engineering firm was experiencing morale and turnover issues in the senior leadership team. The situation reached a head when a senior leader approached the Chairman of the Board (a risky political move that highlights the severity of the problem) to report the difficulty, and to warn of possible additional turnover ahead in key roles.

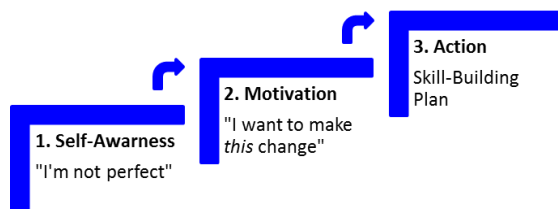
The CEO was confronted by the Chairman, and an external leadership development firm was engaged to help. A diagnosis was conducted (a 360° survey and personality inventory) and a senior coach assigned.

The diagnosis revealed a clear and classic leadership profile. The CEO’s leadership strengths were very distinct: *Strategic Thinking, Financial Acumen, Assertiveness,* and *Business Skills* all surfaced as key assets. Likewise, developmental opportunities were also clearly identified: *Self-Awareness, Relationship Building, Active Listening,* and *Sensitivity* were all below the norm. It was the archetypal dichotomy: a smart, business savvy leader with a clear task agenda, but without the ability to build relationships, he was unable to engender the necessary trust and commitment from his team. In contemporary vernacular, the CEO had superior intellectual capacity (IQ), but lacked interpersonal competence (EQ).

After a two year development plan failed to bring about the needed changes (and the dismissal of the CEO), an autopsy on the process affirmed the CEO never really did accept the need to change (acknowledge, “I’m not perfect”), nor did he truly commit to working on his action plan. As confirmed by research done by Leslie and Van Velsor at the Center for Creative Leadership, “the typical leadership development assumes the executive ‘gets it’ and wants to change”. Yet the research points out that most derailed executives, even in the face of strong contrary evidence, are confident that what worked for them in the past will continue to work in the future. They are simply not motivated to alter their behavior, even in the face of dismissal.

Simply put, there are three steps that must be taken to assure successful leadership development. The first is a general sincere awareness of the need to grow/desire to improve. Once that step is taken, the second is a motivation to act on the identified needs (“what’s in it for me?”). The third and of course necessary step needed is a skill-building plan.

Steps Needed for Leadership Development



Elements of Good Development Plans

Once openness to change and personal commitment to THIS change have been tested, then the final ingredient in making change is a good development plan.

A plan needs these elements to work:

1. Is based on a solid assessment of strengths and weaknesses (personal and objective).
2. Chooses developmental focus in organizational context; what will develop me AND the organization?
3. Is focused on ONE, maybe two changes.
4. Includes actions and experiences that teach the most (i.e., challenging projects, developing a mentor, and other on-the-job experiences).
5. Is staged and dynamic: has local and distant horizons (6 months, 1 year, 3 years) and changes with context.
6. Involves the boss all along the way.

Final Thoughts

In the self-actualized person, personal growth is a reward unto itself. One of life’s lessons and joys is that lifelong learning is rewarding and exciting. It’s this perspective that is a key driver in any successful development, and a key component in learning organizations that support a coaching culture. It’s much easier to grow in a company that supports growth. But no matter what, it’s healthier to value and model continuous growth.

References

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