10 Leadership Essentials for 2022

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The massive upheavals of 2020 and 2021 have threaded crisis and uncertainty throughout just about every organization around the globe. In considering this, I'm reminded of the fact that when severe storms hit, yes, buildings fall and communities are disrupted, but something as simple as a palm tree can survive by bending, not breaking.

Likewise, in order to survive, thrive and profit, organizations must move from disruption to reinvention — must evolve to retain and grow their people to ensure a successful talent pipeline — and the most vital organizations will additionally thrive by giving more than they take from the world.

Put simply, 2022 demands a more human approach, and as a result a new leadership strategy. Leaders who can remain optimistic, build agility in times of disruption and deliver business strategies will create workplaces for both people and organizations to flourish and succeed.

Here's how to get started reimagining your strategy:

1. Sharpen your future leadership skills

Honestly assessing your abilities when it comes to effective guidance is vital if you are to lead in a crisis and beyond, and a quick leadership self-assessment can identify what you

can do to improve them. As part of an action plan to this, immersive learning experiences provide the opportunity to operate in contexts where your skills may be limited, because part of a learner's mindset is seeking experiences that push you outside of familiar surroundings to build the capacity to face future challenges.

2. Harness emotional intelligence

Managers who lead with empathy are more likely to develop high levels of trust with their employees, foster a culture of transparency and proactively ask questions to understand contexts better. To these ends, self-awareness is a foundational capability, in part because it helps people identify strengths and areas in which they could benefit from development. By building emotional intelligence, leaders can self-reflect and recognize their impact on others — to lead with humility and integrity. Just as self-awareness is crucial for authenticity, sharing information and ideas freely and listening with the intent of understanding can empower leaders to influence, impact and inspire.

Related: 5 Ways Emotional Intelligence Will Make You a Better Leader

3. Become a feedback expert

Leaders can drive performance improvement via consistent and personalized feedback. Organizations, meanwhile, can foster a deeper understanding of human behavior and improve the quality and impact of their communication by delivering spontaneous feedback rather than waiting for more rigid structures like an annual review. As part of this process, leaders need to ask themselves self-reflective questions to ensure that this effort is respectful and impactful, such as:

"What am l observing going on?"

“What is the impact of what l am seeing and hearing?”

“If l provide feedback, would this correct or enhance the behavior and shift performance?” “Is now the best time to deliver it?”

“How do l give a message that’s most likely to resonate with this individual?”

4. Grow tomorrow’s leaders today

Leadership development, in tandem with a greater focus on employee development, creates an environment where skills, capabilities and potential will be focal points, and both identifies and nurtures upcoming leaders. Whether it’s identifying a lead project initiative, running a group session, or implementing a development coach, processes for individuals to self-invest in their development is vital. For instance, for middle managers, connecting them to a senior leader for mentoring – providing role modelling in how to communicate, lead and facilitate leading – provides opportunities both to learn and practice what they have absorbed.

Offering bespoke programs, so individuals feel like they have been given the red-carpet treatment, is worth the investment. For instance, IBM hosts global Innovation Jams – a virtual method for gathering people together – that fosters jamming about various topics and which helps create a powerful employee voice that can drive innovation and collaboration. Unilever, for its part, initiated a year-long leadership development program for executives to uncover their purpose.

Related: 4 Steps to Build Strategically Critical Leadership-Development Programs

5. Invest in capabilities

Sounding Board, Inc.'s *2021 Leadership Coaching Report* estimated that global investment in leadership development exceeds $3.5 billion. As a result of the global pandemic and the "Great Resignation," organizations are investing in leadership coaching for individuals to build necessary skills for navigating an uncertain business landscape, and the resulting bench strength will help fill future critical job roles.

Leadership coaching has the power to support employees to unleash productive work habits and reach their full potential. To succeed in the current era requires agility and adaptability so leaders can quickly adjust to the tides of change.

6. Nurture employee wellbeing

The recent mass exodus of talent has created a frenzy within organizations, termed by The Society for Human Resource Management as the "turnover tsunami." One of the takeaways is that people are now not as interested in perks and fringe benefits (like treadmill desks and on-site massages) as much as workplace culture – how leaders support the ways work gets done, the day-to-day experiences of employees and how committed leaders are to staff wellbeing and keeping its best interests at heart.

Recent Gallup research has borne this out: In its 2021 book, *Wellbeing at Work: How to Build Resilient and Thriving Teams*, poll results indicate that those cultures with effective work-life integration and growth opportunities are better positioned to retain talent. Workplaces can implement various strategies to do this, such as LinkedIn worldwide giving a paid week off to employees as an opportunity to unplug and recharge. The Wanderlust Group took it one step further by

implementing a four-day work week to mitigate burnout, regarding it as versatile recruiting tool. Leaders also need to ensure a level playing field for all employees alongside these benefits.

Related: 18 Business Leaders on Creating an Inclusive and Equitable Society

7. Row like a crew

Teamwork is a business imperative and a keystone of high performance. Whether you are working in the same space or remotely, business growth is a reflection of teamwork in action. Even though every member might have an individual mastery of technique and talent, they must learn to row with the rest of the crew. In addition, each person must learn how to simultaneously follow *and* lead to create success.

8. Generate an inclusive workplace

When onboarding, leaders need to consider establishing inclusivity tools such as employee resource groups (ERGs) to gather people into groups with similar concerns – effectively creating a buddy system, one that could include an employee "host" to introduce new staff to others on the team. Leaders can highlight the work of others in the organization and create an employee development meet where those from underrepresented demographics can provide insights into professional paths employees can pursue. Organizational leaders, meanwhile, can link mentors to employees to support skill development and work towards desired future roles. And for those exiting job positions, it's helpful to ask them what would have created a more supportive environment and/or a better transition outlook.

9. Embed practices

Successfully fostering an inclusive workplace goes beyond setting DEI goals and making public diversity statements. Leaders must also integrate actionable methods that encourage inclusion at every stage of the employee experience. From diverse hiring processes to delivering an individual onboarding experience to equitable professional development — the goal is to provide an environment where all employees can thrive and be given equal opportunities.

Related: Want Your Employees to Stay? Be Accountable to Your DEI Goals

10. Remember lessons

Unfortunately, leaders too often let experiential takeaways slide. In the absence of an immediate cost, lessons learned are often overlooked, leaving leaders unprepared. An ongoing strategy of proactive thinking and prudence is necessary if the aim is to improve resilience and business adaptability, whether one is in the midst of a crisis or not.

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