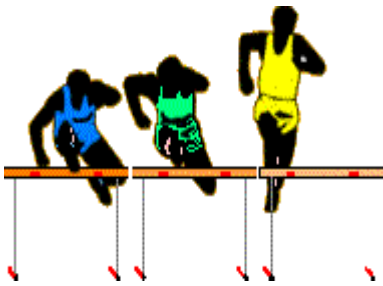




Solid Leadership Advice: 10 Ideas for Building Your Leadership Bench Strength & Improving Company Performance

By Gayle Lantz



When it comes to leadership bench strength, some company benches are dangerously light. These companies, from large corporations to small and mid-sized businesses, lack the talent needed to sustain or grow the business beyond its current level.

Some companies have depended on the same leaders for years without developing new leaders. Other companies have attempted to develop leaders, but there is no strategic or integrated approach. Still other companies have unexpectedly lost leaders they were counting on.

Each year, about 25 percent of managers in typical Fortune 500 companies change jobs. Most spend an average of four years in a given position. High potential leaders in mid-senior ranks move more frequently: every two to three years. These statistics demonstrate why companies must build solid leadership. Leaders must concentrate on developing their teams, getting the right people in the right jobs and producing results.

Job dissatisfaction is up. Some research indicates that one out of six people expects to quit a job in the next year. There are more opportunities for people to seek “greener pastures.” Good leadership can influence a person’s decision to remain with a company.

10 Ideas for Building Your Leadership Bench Strength

If your company wants to build leadership strength, here are my top ten suggestions:

1. Transfer knowledge and experience from the top

Companies can capture the wisdom from experienced leaders to aid in educating and developing future leaders.

2. Build relationships across generations

Leadership skills, talents and values differ across generations. Dealing with these differences constructively strengthens the overall leadership of your organization.

3. Strengthen leadership peer relationships

Often, large organizations operate like a conglomeration of silos. It's easy for leaders to feel isolated in their roles. Helping leaders learn from each other and strengthening interpersonal relationships build needed peer support and camaraderie.

4. Develop succession plans

Companies shouldn't wait until the need for a leader is obvious. Careful thought and planning in advance eases the transition.

5. Identify and nurture high-potential leaders

Pay special attention to those employees possessing strong capabilities operating below the radar. They can be the most likely to leave.

6. Provide needed cross departmental learning and exposure

With better knowledge of other departments and the organizational system as a whole, leaders can help your departments function more effectively.

7. Offer executive coaching/real-time learning

Large companies are turning to fresh approaches to help executives learn, get feedback and gain support based on experiential learning. Many executives like the personalized approach.

8. Include more leaders in strategic planning

In my work with leaders in many corporations across a broad based range of industries, I find one of their most common challenges is the need to think and act more strategically. Busy executives struggle to find the time to think about the issues they most want or care about. Their focus is diffused. Fostering strategic thinking early in a leader's career will serve him or her well in the future.

9. Provide mentoring or coaching support for new managers

Along with a new title and pay raise, new managers should benefit by having stronger initial support through mentoring or coaching programs to help them get acclimated in their new roles.

10. Assess leadership talent

There are a variety of assessments in the marketplace to help companies assess leadership skills, behaviors and values. These tools give leaders insights to help them increase their effectiveness.

A Bonus Leadership Idea -- Open Dialogue

One of the greatest benefits to any organization is the opportunity to invite conversation about leadership across all levels. Start by asking questions like these:

- What does your company value most about its leadership?
- What improvement would you like to see?
- What is your company's philosophy about leadership?
- What would outstanding leadership enable your company to do better?
- What leadership skills are critical for success?
- What is the impact of your company's leadership on your employees? Your organization? Your market? The community?

As you address these kinds of questions, make a commitment to raise the bar on the level of leadership that exists in your organization. Build your bench strength, but don't let leaders sit too long. They're anxious to lead.

About the author:

Gayle Lantz is president of WorkMatters, Inc. <http://www.workmatters.com>, an organizational development consulting firm that can help your company improve performance through consulting, coaching and speaking services.