How to Define Great Leadership
Using the Power of Data

When you meet a great leader, you know it. It's inspiring. Energizing. There's a palpable, positive energy. You feel motivated to do your best. Even if you can't quite articulate exactly why, you feel compelled to follow and learn and go where that leader leads.

Truth is, when you meet a leader that's only "meh," it can also be tough to say why. You just know this one isn't it.

Is your organization leaving leadership to chance? Here are six ways to avoid "accidental" leadership, using data to shape your great future leaders.

Map Your Vision

George Harrison famously sang, "If you don't know where you're going, any road'll take you there." All leaders need direction, a destination. Your senior leaders should make the company vision very clear. What markets will the company serve? How does that change the products or services you'll offer over time? What are the company's priorities and next steps?

Be sure every leader in your organization can speak to the vision – and connect the dots – for their teams and individuals, so every person is informed, inspired, and ready to do their part to move the company forward.

Define Great Leadership

To develop excellent leaders, you first need to agree on the characteristics required to lead well in your organization. Some leadership skills are universal – strong communication, curiosity, an ability to delegate, a sense of humor.

Other skills and competencies will be unique to your organization. Is yours a culture of collaboration or competition? Do you rely on creative thinkers or must your workers adhere to a strict plan? Are you delivering rapidly evolving technology solutions or products that meet exact specifications?

Take time to identify and define your leadership competencies. Consider how the competencies will be defined, assessed, and rated – then select a competency model that supports your goals.

Know Your Baseline

To measure whether a leader is successful – or at least making progress – conduct a competency assessment. Once you've nailed the list of skills and behaviors embodied by great leaders, make a point to find out what your new leaders are doing well now and where they have gaps to close.

Ideally, you're conducting assessments as new leaders step into their roles. Or even before, if you've got your eye on employees with the potential to grow and lead. That way, you all have a solid, objective baseline understanding of where the leader will shine first. And where each will benefit from extra experience, exposure, training, and support.

Harness Data for Insight

Often, scorecards that measure leadership performance are not surprising to the leaders. They generally have a pretty good feel about whether things are working well or not. What data-driven performance reviews do, though, is pinpoint the trouble spots and the areas of strength.

This feedback is essential for converting "accidental" leadership into intentional leadership. Without the insight, leaders can easily keep making the same mistake. Or, they can unwittingly change something that had been working well for their team.

Conduct 360 reviews to collect feedback from managers, peers and direct reports. Use the feedback data to identify gaps and actions to improve the effectiveness of each leader.

Insist on Learning

In the same way that strong leaders inspire others to expand their skills, your leaders need to grow, too. Most great leaders are curious and eager to push themselves, to take on more. Not all, though, are naturally inclined to work on their weak spots.

As learning guru Donald H. Taylor points out, the role of learning and development "is no longer to provide information, but rather to inspire and support learning." Together, put a learning plan in place for each rising leader to ensure they're developing in the way that will serve them, their team, and your company well.

Keep Up with the Times

The best leaders stand the tests of time. They inspire and lead year after year, decade after decade. But adapting leadership best practices to keep up with changing demographics, market conditions, and company goals is not intuitive to all.

Be sure you're systematically refreshing leadership goals, skills, and competencies to take your organization into the future.

Ultimately, the most sustainable leadership development program is one that identifies the next generation of leaders, now. Fruitful succession planning initiatives are data-driven, too. The data will tell you which employees may be interested and able to take on a future leadership role, when to expand your talent pool with experts from the outside, and how well your leaders are preparing now for what comes next.

Are you looking to leverage competency data to create intentional leaders? Contact us to discuss how WebMentor Skills™ can help you assess and manage competencies for your great future leaders.

About Avilar

Avilar – The Competency Company™ is a leader in web-based competency management and learning solutions for corporations, government, and non-profit organizations. Formed in 1997, Avilar was a pioneer with its award-winning WebMentor™ product line and has built itself on the basis of superior customer service and highly adaptable product design.

Avilar consultants are recognized as industry thought leaders and have decades of experience in implementation and analysis. Let Avilar help you transform your organization from ordinary to extraordinary.