

PUTTING YOUR COMPANY UNDER A MICROSCOPE

- A Continuing Series of Management Insights from The Jennings Group -

10 STEPS TO MORE EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

By Olin R. Jennings



Presidents and CEOs of engineering, environmental, and construction companies continue to evaluate their leadership needs and pool of leadership talent, and ask, “How can we be more effective in creating the leaders we need to deal with the myriad of issues facing us?”

Leadership as a strategic issue Developing leaders is more than a program. It is a fundamental strategic issue that overarches all other business, customer, market, operating, and strategic initiatives or improvements. Making a commitment to make better managers by making better leaders is essential to continuing success. In the words of presidents interviewed in a recent survey on leadership by The Jennings Group:

- “The negative side of not having adequate leadership is that you get stuck. You can’t move in as many directions as you need to.”
- “The biggest constraint to implementing any strategic plan is the leadership.”
- “In 28 years in the industry, I’ve never met a company that had enough leaders.”

10 Step Process Like all strategic issues, leadership development should be approached using a systematic evaluation and planning process. For those companies that are considering a more formal leadership development program, we recommend the following steps:

Assess where you are now in developing leaders Consider your leadership needs and the adequacy of your managers as leaders in both the senior management team as well as the next tiers of managers. Identify leadership deficiencies. Identify problems such as blocked career paths, autocratic managers that may be threatened by a true leadership culture, and other problems. Rate the company’s performance in developing leaders with its current approach. Evaluate your company’s values or belief system and its culture, and ask yourself how much these values truly

embody leadership and whether your culture is really a leadership culture that encourages everyone to be a leader in something.

Decide where you want to be Determine how important leadership development should be as a strategic priority, and how important a leadership culture is to your company and its future success. Ask what the company should be achieving over the next two to three years and over the longer term. What should be the company’s objectives?

Ensure senior executive team commitment Consider carefully the role and commitment of the senior management/leadership team and the board to creating a leadership culture. The organization must see the senior leadership team’s sustaining commitment or the program will be perceived within the organization as just another training course. In our survey, we found several companies that had weak or dysfunctional leadership development programs because the president or board was not fully committed. Leadership development must become part of the senior executives’ mind set and should be considered as part of each decision. Start any formal training at the top and work down. This approach reinforces the senior level commitment, provides input to the program which will improve its effectiveness for middle level managers, and equips the senior executives as better leaders and mentors.

Recognize the financial constraints Keep in mind the time and cost impact of any new program, and particularly recognize that only so many changes at a time can be initiated *and successfully implemented*. Tailor your program to be effective given the financial constraints.

Develop a longer term strategy and plan Develop short term and longer term objectives as well as a strategy and specific plans to achieve those objectives. Remember that a leadership culture is not achieved overnight. Consider all

elements of leadership development including a formal leadership course, mentoring, career development, and other follow-up and reinforcement. As one element of the strategy, infuse some level of people skills training in all training courses.

Create a formal leadership development program Develop a formal leadership course as a launching point, make the mentoring of course graduates a priority, create opportunities for graduates to participate as leaders in task forces and committees, and promote graduates into new positions or assign new responsibilities over time. Begin the process of creating a more integrated and more proactive career and leadership development effort, including the HR support systems. In establishing the formal course, consider the benefits of a shared experience to the individual participants and corporate culture vs the expediency of sending managers to an outside public course one or two people at a time.

Keep the program manageable Recognize that only so much can be achieved at one time. Therefore, some corporate support systems may be more informal at the beginning. Use people who have participated in the formal course to infuse leadership into your culture and inspire those below them to become more effective leaders.

Limit participation in the formal leadership course Limit participation in the formal course each year. Offer the formal course to other managers in following years and move down into the middle management over time. This approach has two advantages – cost and message to the organization. First, a company can afford only so large a program without impacting utilization and taking away from technical and other critical

training. Second, more limited participation adds to the perception that participants have been selected as potential future leaders and that the company is investing preferentially in them. This approach makes the program more attractive and helps to change organizational behavior. Other managers will modify their behavior to be in a better position to be selected for the next class. Running many classes in one year adds to the cost and creates the perception that this is just another training program. A real barrier to implementing a formal leadership development program is overcoming the possible negative impact of selecting the first class on those not selected. Deal with the managers who are not selected through personal counseling and positive encouragement of behavior changes. Do not tell them why they were not selected. Rather, explain why others were selected based on their behavior.

Once established, continue to review and refine the program Your leadership development program should be a live and dynamic process. Presidents interviewed for our study of leadership programs indicated that they made significant improvements to the process for several years. Ask participants in the formal course how it can be improved. Bring participants from the formal course together to brainstorm on how to create more leadership development opportunities for them and other managers. Create a leadership development committee at the board level which also is responsible for leadership transition issues.

Remember the objectives Constantly remind yourself that the objective is not a program. The objective is a process to inspire leadership in all employees and create a leadership culture in which everyone is a leader in something.

The Jennings Group

*Management Consulting And Training Services
For Engineering, Environmental Services, and Contracting Companies*

- Leadership development
- Relationship building/selling skills training
- Management development training
- Client feedback program improvement
- Customer surveys
- Management / operations reviews
- Business and strategic planning
- Service improvement
- Marketing and selling programs
- Market studies and evaluations
- Organization planning and development
- Acquisition due diligence

37 Ramseyburg Road
Columbia, NJ 07832
(908) 475-1100