

# PUTTING YOUR COMPANY UNDER A MICROSCOPE

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

## OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT - ACHIEVING LASTING BENEFITS

By Olin R. Jennings

Leadership development has been a topic of discussion among engineering, environmental, and construction companies for a number of years and is recognized as a high priority need. However, companies have been slow to implement more formal leadership development programs.

**Barriers to creating a formal program** Presidents and CEOs face a significant number of problems or barriers in creating a successful program including:

- Overcoming the challenge of transforming technical managers and analytical personalities into leaders;
- Changing the old perception that people are natural leaders or non-leaders, and training to grow leadership skills is a waste of money;
- Changing the view that leadership development is needed just to ensure the next senior leadership transition vs a basic requirement for the growth, financial performance, and longer term health of the business;
- Convincing the senior management team that leadership development is a true strategic issue vs just a training and development program;
- Tailoring your leadership development program to the unique needs of analytical personalities;
- Focusing on leadership development and recognizing that it is significantly different from project or program manager training and that a “super project manager” training which includes softer people skills is not really leadership development;
- Dealing with negative issues, particularly the potential problem of selecting the first leadership class and counseling those not selected;
- Recognizing that leadership is inspired over time and making real commitments to go beyond the formal development course into dynamic follow-up, with a reinforcement process which requires better senior executive level mentoring skills as well as changes throughout the company.



### Overcoming the barriers

Based on our knowledge of leadership development in over 100 companies and our work developing leadership programs, a few simple steps and decisions will help overcome these barriers.

**Make a strategic decision** Success requires a senior level commitment to leadership development *as a strategic issue*, not a program. Therefore, approach this issue with the view that you may need to change the mind set of the senior executive team and board. This approach may require you to take smaller, bite sized steps rather than to make a full, multiple year commitment at the outset. We recommend using The Jennings Group’s 10 step process (see prior article). In summary, this process includes:

- Conducting an analysis of where you are now in developing leaders by (1) determining where you need to be in order to meet strategic objectives and (2) assessing past performance in leadership development. Key steps are interviewing senior managers to get their input and ensuring their commitment by making them part of the strategic discussion and decision. The objective is a changed mind set and strategic commitment.
- Selecting the first class and involving them in what should be included in the formal course as well as follow-up and implementation programs.
- Creating/tailoring a formal course, putting it on, and getting input to refine it for the next class.

**Carefully select your resources** Consider carefully your resources and the resources required to (1) facilitate the senior level strategic decisions, (2) create and put on a leadership course, and (3) help in creating and implementing the follow-up and reinforcement process. Based on comments made to us by presidents and CEOs, you should be looking for resources that bring:

- Knowledge of your industry and managing a technical service business;
- Understanding of analytical personalities and a

good approach to changing their mind sets;

- Knowledge of leadership programs for analytical personalities and technical managers;
- Ability to consult and help evaluate your needs;
- Ability to tailor a leadership course and program to meet your specific needs.

**Focus on implementation** Leadership development is like any other initiative. Anyone can have a good idea. The real strategic benefit comes from careful planning, using the right resources in the formal course and, most of all, good implementation and follow-up. Too many companies invest in training

and staff development programs and achieve success in changing mind sets, but do not mentor and follow up effectively after a formal course to reinforce longer term behavior change. They make investments of lost billable time and outside expenses, but do not reap the longer term benefits of these training investments. Therefore, focusing on implementation is essential to success, including evaluating and remedying weaknesses (such as senior level mentoring skills) as well as ensuring good follow through. Leadership is inspired and drawn from within, and leadership skills are strengthened over time.

## *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