



The Growth Mindset: Developing Your Successors With Intention, Purpose and Personal Focus

By Hank Carabelli, Claire Saccardi and Emily Livorsi

When companies adopt growth mindsets, those organizations are more readily able to identify and grow leadership potential in their employees.

A true asset in today's tight labor market, the growth mindset helps companies gain strategic advantage, win the war for talent, develop people who are both innovative and collaborative, and ultimately thrive in competitive business markets.

Largely reactive and nonintentional by nature, the engineering and construction (E&C) approach to leadership development is in clear need of a radical transformation. Leading organizations in our industry are beginning to use a more rigorous and systemic approach to leadership development, realizing the benefits of disciplined leadership development.

This pivot from fluid and reactionary leadership development to one that's both intentional and strategic parallels the industry's approach to safety nearly 25 years ago. Those organizations that applied structured processes, treating safety as a differentiating strategy and addressing it in a way that touched all levels of the organization, could reduce incidents and claims.

"The vast majority of leadership programs are set curricula delivered through classroom-taught, rationally based, individual-focused methods. Participants are taken out of their day-to-day workplaces to be inspired by expert faculty, work on case studies, receive personal feedback and take away the latest leadership thinking (and badges for their résumés)," writes Harvard Business Review's Deborah Rowland in "[Why Leadership Development Isn't Developing Leaders](#)." "Yet study after study, including my own, tells us the qualities that leaders in today's world need are intuitive, dynamic, collaborative and grounded in here-and-now emotional intelligence."

In today's E&C industry, implementing a rigorous leadership development process will ultimately accelerate an organization's path to success. In this article, we'll outline the problems companies face when cultivating the next generation of leaders (versus how the industry has traditionally faced leadership development), and, conversely, how most effectively to manage them (i.e., how to think differently about leadership development to achieve strategic advantage).

We Just “Figured It Out”

When our industry considers leadership development, we often hear seasoned executives say that, when they transitioned into new roles, they “just figured it out” back when everything was “sink or swim.” While this may have been a baptism by fire, of sorts, with those executives learning fast, the same individuals are hesitant to throw future leaders into the deep end for these good reasons:

1. Putting people into challenging roles prematurely can create real risk for the business. At senior leadership levels, “developmental growing pains” can translate to real bottom-line impact to the organization.
2. Leaders may feel that relinquishing control and transferring power are emotionally challenging.
3. The pace of the business is greater than ever before, and there is simply not enough time for trial and error to be the sole foundational element of learning and growth.

To prepare future leaders to take the reins of one’s organization, current executives must apply leadership development methods that meet today’s standards while also addressing tomorrow’s needs.

Deep-sixing the “Sink or Swim” Mindset

Traditional leadership development often lacks a clear intentionality. More often than not, when an employee is promoted to a new role, he or she simply takes on the responsibilities in a “sink or swim” type of scenario. While there are many positive attributes associated with on-the-job training (OJT), utilizing this approach as the sole—or primary—learning method has many drawbacks, especially for acquiring leadership knowledge and skills.

For example, we have all witnessed junior employees who acquired poor technical skills and knowledge due to limited initial support and formal onboarding. We have also seen how, in absence of intentionality, successors can’t adequately gain critical leadership skills. At best, this approach slows down the successor’s ability to pick up on these skills. At worst, it results in poor leadership behaviors that can impact a company’s legacy, culture and bottom line. To avoid these traps, organizations should follow the three-step process described below and shown in Exhibit 1.

EXHIBIT 1

Maximized Talent Development



Source: FMI’s Center for Strategic Leadership

A Case of Successor Development:

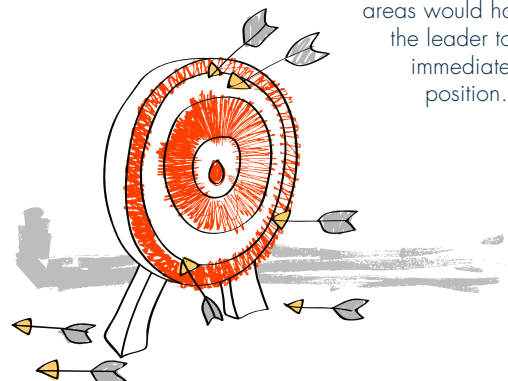
The Leader: Newly promoted VP of operations

The Context: The organization was in the middle of a comprehensive acquisition strategy that required a greater aptitude on the part of its VP of operations.

The Leadership Development Approach: Leadership development was launched internally to accelerate the VP into his new role. The individual was told to attend classes on public speaking, time management and writing effectively as foundational steps for development.

The Big Miss: Though the training provided some value for the individual and expanded his knowledge (due to the individual’s lack of a formal education in business), these learning initiatives missed the immediate needs of the candidate and provided very little return on investment (ROI). Given the comprehensive acquisition strategy, the VP really needed to develop greater financial acumen, a deeper understanding of the business model of the combined organizations, and a means by which to remove costs from the business without negatively affecting schedule or quality of projects that were under contract. A clear link between corporate strategy and the required competencies of this key leader was imperative. In fact, in our view, more

timely development in these key areas would have prepared the leader to address the immediate needs of his position.



Step 1: Make It Intentional

While most executives suggest that tomorrow's leaders aren't ready to take on tomorrow's challenges—and agree that this presents a strategic issue—very few actually lead and sponsor this process. Moreover, in the context of executive succession, this support must come from the company's leading executives (i.e., CEO, owner, president). This top-down approach ensures that the entire organization is onboard with the charge, and that it's not just being orchestrated at the individual department or manager level. Fundamentally, current executives must acknowledge their strategic roles in leader and successor development and implement processes that intentionally support the development of future generations. Moving away from on-the-job training as the sole learning mechanism, for example, ensures that leadership development is accelerated and reduces the likelihood of leadership misfire. Methods could include executive coaching, competency-based executive workshops, strategic mentoring relationships, clear action and stretch assignments or rotational assignments. Whatever method chosen, it is critical that development is implemented with intent.

Step 2: Make It Purposeful

To prepare leaders for the future, organizations must develop successors based on where leaders need to go to address the business's near- and long-term needs. Ignore this step and you'll quickly find your company stagnating or, even worse, moving backwards down the food chain. Leaders who address their business's strategic needs make calculated bets on the ROI of leadership development and ensure that time, man-hours and financial resources will create impactful competencies. For example, if an organization that's expecting a long-term strategy wants to grow geographically, it may be critical for the associated operations leader to develop competencies that are aligned with that strategy (i.e., building strategic relationships, learning new markets quickly, identifying potential new regional talent or building new teams).

Step 3: Make It Personal

If the 2000s were all about individualization, then the 2010s are all about personalization and customization. Here are two ways that companies can develop leaders in a very personalized manner:

Put challenges in front of top candidates. To prepare future leaders, managers should focus on creating opportunities in the workplace to learn more about the business, try new skills and practice leading differently. One way to do this is by assigning “stretch” projects. For instance, if an employee is identified for an executive position, but if he or she has poor negotiating skills, then let that person take the lead, even if that employee doesn't normally handle negotiations for his or her team. Or if that feels like too much, allow him or her to assist. Your leader will be much quicker to grasp the concept of negotiation in its context when it is personal.

Create a “holistic” experience. Executives must understand the entirety of the organization, how it operates and the nuances of its culture. Great executives in our industry can speak to the strategic opportunities and challenges in functional departments and on different teams. We often hear executives concerned that their future generation lacks this holistic perspective of the organization and how it operates. The problem is that most future leaders lack the ability to experience other elements of the business in a hands-on fashion. By exposing your future executives to other areas of the business—via rotational assignments or participation on cross-functional projects and teams—your likelihood of preparing a more well-rounded executive will increase exponentially.

Getting Into the Growth Mindset

When developing leaders, many companies utilize a traditional approach that lacks strategic focus and alignment with personal needs. Leaders have differing personalities, natural abilities, skill sets and underlying competencies as well as varying values, goals and views about how the world works. Positions that make up an organization's structure, similarly, vary in specific requirements of knowledge, experience and capabilities.

As Melissa Daimler pointed out in Harvard Business Review's "[Why Leadership Development Has to Happen on the Job](#)," "Organizational learning has to become less about the kind of learning done in a training session or online tutorial and more about continuous learning on the job. That means creating a work environment that supports and encourages learning, one that's less about individuals learning new skills on their own, and more about using their environment to learn and learning from one another."

Not surprisingly, the most effective approaches to development are highly personalized and specific to both the position and the individual. Too often, development plans lack clarity and focus as to what specific competencies need development, and this can have real impact on organizations' health. To best accelerate business performance, focus on linking strategy with personalized development plans, based on a true gap assessment of key competencies required by individuals who are assuming key positions.



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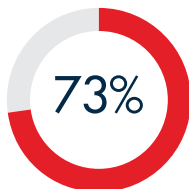
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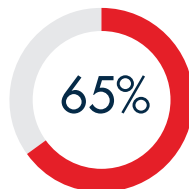
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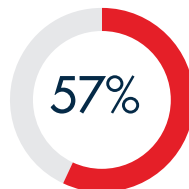
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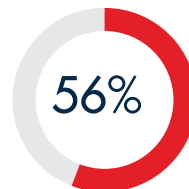
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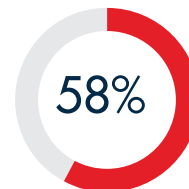
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