



# DO YOU HAVE A PLAN?

Leadership development is a challenging and time-consuming effort, whether for an individual or an organization. Hardwork and a commitment to excellent performance are required of both. Successful organizations have a clearly defined leadership development process resulting in the identification, selection and education of future leaders. Mediocre and unsuccessful organizations usually fail to place emphasis on the development of successful leaders, resulting in less than effective performance throughout.

Whether or not the organization has an effective leadership development program does not preclude an individual from developing a personal program. In organizations where such a program exists, a personal program will enhance the learning and improve the chances of success. In those organizations where a leadership development program is lacking, a personal program will raise the individual above peers. In other words, a personal leadership development program is of value regardless of what the organization does or does not provide.

A mixture of both science and art, leadership development focuses on learning skills and developing knowledge required to successfully lead people and units to success. Leadership development, done correctly, requires a

process and a plan. The science of leadership is found in books, manuals and presentations, while the art of leadership is gained through experience, example and mentoring.

The process of leadership development consists of learning both the science and the art, and then applying both to the leadership effort. Identifying specific learning goals and objectives,

selecting exemplary leaders to study and emulate, identifying effective leaders within the organization from whom to request mentorship, and selecting appropriate books and manuals for reading and guiding learning are examples of the science of leadership.

The art of leadership involves applying the concepts learned from the science and studying the effects, often

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requiring some self-evaluation as well as feedback from within the organization. Critical to success at leadership is the application of effective interpersonal skills, to be developed as part of the art. The science provides the doctrine, the art provides the effort.

A leadership development plan is a roadmap consisting of a timeline with benchmarks and milestones along the path. Timelines create a calendar and, by their creation, drive the effort toward completion of the goal. Without a timeline, effort often becomes hit-and-miss and results in failed completion.



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Benchmarks are generally accepted standards for specific performance, in this case usually the completion of specified subjects leading in a logical manner to completion of an identified learning objective. Completing a specific leadership course, finishing the reading of a specific manual or book or attending a selected leadership presentation are examples of accomplishing benchmarks along the timeline toward becoming a successful leader.

Milestones are specific identifiers of “distance” travelled along the timeline. Key points to be reached, milestones indicate progress toward the overall goal of effective leadership development. Examples include receiving in-service leadership certificates,



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completing key degree-producing requirements in an institution of learning, gaining a specific assignment within the organization or advancement or promotion to key positions.

A leadership development plan, consisting of a timeline complete with benchmarks and milestones, will focus the effort and drive an individual leadership development process, greatly enhancing the chance of success.

Future and aspiring leaders would do well to identify a leadership development process and design a plan. Directed effort is always more efficient than occasional and sporadic bursts of activity. It is not easy, but it makes the individual better. After all, why be ordinary? Why not be the envy of those who stand there and watch? ■

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