

Practical tools to leverage leadership skills and tap the organizations's capabilities

The Miller Leadership Model discussed in the previous two articles set forth leadership philosophies. Its practical complement is the Miller Leadership Pyramid, a system of processes that provides the leader with the tools to execute when in management mode. The Miller Leadership Pyramid's toolbox has three drawers: leadership behavior, reward systems and career planning. Each of the drawers contains a number of tools from which the leader can select those that apply to the organization's current needs.

BOTTOM DRAWER: LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR

The bottom drawer is divided into two compartments, philosophies, which require total buy-in from the leader, and process tools from which the leader chooses only those that make sense for the organization.

LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHIES

- Give everyone credit. Team members who are given credit for their contributions will accept ever-increasing levels of challenge.
- Become a team member. Typically, leaders will be able to provide critical information or unique insights as part of project review meetings. The consistently effective Leader provides this guidance without diminishing the team members' contribution to reaching the team's goals.
- Share information. The leader is the catalyst for information moving through the organization. By listening in meetings and hallways leaders can improve implementation time frames by ensuring that staff members are communicating information to anyone who should have it.
- Insist on completed staff work. One of the great thieves of leadership time and leverage is "delegation-up." This happens when an employee brings an incomplete project to the boss for input. Completed staff work includes clarity, in advance, on how the manager will use the requested data, followed by delivery of the data requested including additional information needed to accomplish the goal, answers to questions raised by the data and recommendations.
- Ensure absolute consistency in decision-making and risk/reward decisions. Educating staff members in these two areas materially enhances the effectiveness of delegation. Once understood, they will incorporate the same filters in

their "completed staff work," reducing recycling while providing higher quality recommendations.

LEADERSHIP PROCESSES

- Hold periodic staff meetings for downward communication and team building. These meetings are the forums to discuss crucial business issues, air cross-functional integration issues and obtain reports on the high-leverage projects that mandate the leader's involvement.
 - Develop items of importance (IOIs) or written documents that serve as the upward and peer-to-peer communication vehicle. As they are passed up through the organization, each level edits for relevance to the next level and adds its own perspective. Their input provides leaders with periodic activity reports so they can decide where to get involved. It is important that the top-down and bottom-up vehicles communicate. E.g., IOIs should reflect the status of crucial issues under discussion in the staff meetings.
 - Schedule periodic roundtable discussions with middle management. Keep discussions issues-oriented rather than personalities-oriented and risk-free for participants and their leader.
 - Conduct brief project reviews for high-leverage projects. They keep the leader involved and create opportunities for his or her contributions.
 - Communicate. Create vehicles to ensure that information is shared broadly across the organization and make sure that they are being used.
- Remember, the combined contents of the leadership behavior drawer do not comprise a formula. The philosophies require buy-in, but the processes are choices.

MIDDLE DRAWER: REWARD SYSTEMS

The middle drawer of the Miller Leadership Pyramid contains tools to create effective reward systems. It's amazing how reward systems become unaligned with company goals. In many cases rewards are paid even though there has been no progress towards the strategic priorities.

- Position descriptions. An accurate reflection of each position's responsibilities, all of which are updated at least annually. They, along with periodic goals, form the basis for any reward system.
- Periodic goals with a description of what constitutes success. Help people define goals to strive for and meth-

ods for identifying their accomplishments.

- Performance appraisals. It is critical to let people at all levels know how they are performing, and to provide counseling, mentoring and coaching as needed.
- Base salaries, raises and variable compensation tied to position descriptions, goals and measurement of success. Variable compensation must pay for what advances the organization toward its strategic priorities.
- Company-driven, formal recognition. Employee and management awards are essential. They should be visible, recognizable and consistent; not necessarily monetary.

Miller Leadership Pyramid



- Employee-driven, informal recognition. This can be very simple, but it has tremendous leverage. One business unit of a large organization developed a “feather in your cap” informal recognition program. Notepads with a feather design were given to employees so they could write notes to coworkers who had gone the extra mile. When employees proudly posted these notes in their cubicles, the entire organization adopted the popular program.

TOP DRAWER: CAREER PLANNING

The top drawer of the Miller Leadership Pyramid toolbox contains the tools that support career planning. They help an organization retain the best performers, weed out the poorest and implement internal succession plans.

Career planning as defined here is ongoing and part of the employee appraisal process. People need to know where they fit in the organization, and management needs to understand employees’ goals and aspirations. In GE’s annual resume update process, for example, employees state their desires for career advancement and management gives feedback. Employee and manager then develop a game plan to reach agreed-upon goals.

The process benefits the entire company by establishing succession planning throughout. GE is able to develop internal slates of no less than five people for every position that opens up.

The following tools complement ongoing employee appraisals:

- Forced ranking of all employees based on their future contributions to the company. In a June 1999 Fortune Magazine article, “Why CEOs Fail,” the author says, “More than any other way, [CEOs blow it] by failure to put the right people in the right jobs – and the related failure to fix people problems in time.” High-performing organizations such as GE constantly strive to increase employee quality. Through a forced ranking, a company can proactively identify under-performing personnel and manage talent to raise the average quality of employees.
- Identify high potential individuals. Every company has unique human assets who may become its next set of leaders (e.g., people who can grow two organization layers). It’s wise to provide special development and mentoring to these individuals.
- Skills development and career guidance for all employees. All other things being relatively equal, employees who feel nurtured will remain loyal to the company and make the sacrifices necessary to have their unit (and the company) succeed.

MASTERING EXECUTION

In addition to using the suggestions and ideas found in the Miller Leadership Pyramid tool kit, there are three areas where the leader’s approach will cascade throughout the organization. They are:

- Set high expectations for all activities
- Facilitate team playing across the organizational silos, and
- Deliver the consequences of appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

Only the leader can establish the culture that rewards people for optimum performance, counsels as necessary and weeds out the people who cannot or will not support the strategic priorities.

Effective leadership means successful execution backed by consistently applied principles. Toward that end, the Miller Leadership Pyramid is a menu of execution tools. Its foundation (leadership behavior) is the set of leadership philosophies because they establish an organization’s culture. Upon this foundation, the leader uses the processes and tools, reward systems and career planning techniques to establish an effective organization whose people are focused on accomplishing the strategic priorities. The leader who leverages the tools of the Miller Leadership Pyramid can become a master of execution.

The following quote from Ann Mulcahy, president and CEO of Xerox, says it all: “Many companies spend a great amount of time and resources on developing the perfect strategy, only to see it fail when the implementation is ineffective. Xerox learned from experience that precise execution is the driving force behind any strategic change.” **CW**

See Chemark’s ad this month on page 17.