

BECOMING THE LEADER YOU WANT TO BE

Expectations of leaders and aspiring leaders in business today have never been higher and the demands on them never been greater.

What are these expectations and demands and how can senior executives get the support they need?

First ... there is the sheer volume of work: significant number of tasks to accomplish and vast swathes of information to filter. Emails, phone calls, meetings, travel, conferences, presentations, reports, 24-hour connectivity; it's not surprising if senior executives become exhausted.

Second ... the pace of change and the levels of uncertainty surrounding business decisions have never been higher. In a recent IBM study (*IBM Global Business Services 2010*) 1,600 CEO's worldwide believed that their businesses were more uncertain, more volatile and more complex. Executives who are used to striving for specific, measurable goals may not be so great at handling the ambiguity and fluidity that rapidly changing situations can bring.

Third ... where companies used to run on a simple top-down command and control basis, it is now widely recognised that the best businesses are those that harness creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. The most effective leaders are those that participate in, encourage and manage collaborative teams. The knowledge and skills that worked in a leadership role yesterday may not be so useful today.

Fourth ... leaders and aspiring leaders play a crucial role in engagement. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) defines engagement as "feeling positive about your job, as well as being prepared to go the extra mile and do the best of your ability."

Not surprisingly, engagement is linked to a wide range of positive outcomes. Engaged employees have higher levels of performance and lower levels of absenteeism; are more supportive of change and more resilient in the face of change. Two important drivers of engagement are for people to have opportunities to feed their views upwards and for people to feel well informed about what is happening in their organization. But a key driver of engagement is for people to think their leaders – especially their manager or line manager - is committed to the organization and cares about them.

Fifth ... a major study by Watson Wyatt: *Connecting Organisational Communication to Financial Performance* found that "a significant improvement in communication effectiveness is associated with a 29.5 per cent increase in market value." And where should a significant proportion of responsibility for effective communication rest? You guessed it; once again, it's the leader who needs to be communicating.

So, leaders face a greater work load; a more challenging, fluid and ambiguous business environment than ever before; are key drivers in employee engagement, and their effective communication skills and their ability to harness the creativity and entrepreneurship of their teams is essential if the business is to succeed. It's not surprising that some leaders and aspiring leaders lose focus or wonder if they are doing a good job.

In Development Dimensions International's *Global Leadership Forecast 2011* only 38% of the 12,423 senior executives participating in the study reported the level of leadership in their organization as 'good' or 'excellent.'

However, the positive news for leaders and aspiring leaders is that help is available and that companies want to invest in supporting their leaders and aspiring leaders.

A DMB study in connection with the Human Capital Institute on emerging practices in executive coaching suggests that organizations are planning to increase their investment in supporting leaders and aspiring leaders in several key areas. Specifically, by helping capable executives reach higher performance, and

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in supporting high potential executives. Similarly, coaching is seen as having the greatest impact when it is used to groom high potential executives and help high potential executives achieve higher performance, rather than for remedial purposes.

For those respondents who measured the financial impact of coaching, 77% estimated the ROI on coaching to be at least equal to the investment. Some respondents reported the ROI on coaching to be as high as 500%. An earlier study by the International Professional Management Association found that training plus coaching was four times more effective than training alone.

It will pay dividends for any leader or aspiring leader who wants to fulfill their potential and deliver real benefit to their business to make a solid case for the value of executive coaching. While you are making the case for your organization to invest in executive coaching to support you in challenging times, here are a few hints and tips to keep you on track.

1. Think about what is most important to you. Not what you do but how you behave. In a tough business environment staying true to your values will give you a guiding star on which to base decisions and choose priorities.
2. Leadership is about values and behaviour – not about having all the solutions. Establish end goals and empower your team to come up with solutions – this will open up far more opportunities and motivate your team.
3. Keep communicating. Explain your thinking and keep up an ongoing narrative with your team about the progress towards your goals. Remember any good story has ups and downs, so don't be afraid to admit to adversity.
4. Be consistent. If you set up new initiatives or new ways of doing things – especially if they relate to communication or team empowerment - then keep them going. Show real leadership qualities and stay steady regardless of set-backs.
5. Be decisive. Far more damage is done to businesses by delaying decisions than by taking wrong decisions. If you find yourself unable to take a decision ask what additional information you need to make the decision. If that information is not available then staying true to your values will help make a decision.
6. Remember 80% is good enough. Whatever the task, if its 80% good enough, sign it off and move on. Striving for perfection, or taking on too many tasks because only you can do them well enough is a recipe for bottlenecks, frustration, stress and lack of achievement.
7. Flip negative to positive. When facing a set-back, make a conscious effort to look at the opportunities that a challenging situation presents you with, rather than just the problems. The results may surprise you.
8. Focus on your team rather than yourself. If you focus on supporting your people and enabling them to improve *their* performance in tough times, you will find you are more likely to reach overall goals and less likely run into self- absorption and lack of focus.
9. Be open to learning. Setting out to learn something new, to expand your knowledge or skills is life-enhancing, confidence-boosting and can have a positive effect on other aspects of your performance. Don't close down in reaction to adversity; open up.

And finally I have no hesitation in repeating point 1 because it is so important ...

10. Think about what is most important to you. Not what you do but how you *behave*. In a tough business environment staying true to your values will give you a guiding star on which to base decisions and choose priorities.

**To discuss how Halina Jaroszewska can help
please call: 07718 658909 (international +44 117 927 2276)
or send an email to: halina@halinajaroszewska.com
www.halinajaroszewska.com**

Halina Jaroszewska is an Executive Coach, professionally certified by the International Coach Federation. Halina helps leaders and aspiring leaders to turn uncertainty into a powerful tool for change and growth. Her aim is to enable clients to take their success to the next level, switch surviving into thriving, and maximise their potential during challenging times