

# Executive Excellence

## Developing Your Own Olympic Champions

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**W**e know Olympic athletes need expert coaches at their side to urge them on to gold medals. Even professional athletes never outgrow their need for coaches who can improve their moves, hone their judgment and psych up their will to win, when the real tests come on the playing field.

Why, then, do we give our executives and managers the development resources of Little Leaguers, even though we expect them to perform like Olympic champions?

From my experience "coaching" senior executives, I've seen the need for more personalized leadership programs, especially with executives who have troubling management styles or leadership problems, such as hipshooting, over-control, crisis management, abrasiveness, disorganization, manipulation, procrastination, perfectionism, slow decision-making.

Many executives with leadership flaws are so motivated and effective in achieving impressive results that their managers overlook their lack of polish or insensitivity in dealing with people. But at some point, these problems prevent even talented executives from meeting their own career goals and fulfilling the promise of their potential. This is a loss to their companies, and can result in turnover as people are passed over for promotions for which they believe they deserve.

### PERSONAL LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Many companies neglect personal training in leadership effectiveness. Yet studies show that interpersonal skills, not technical or functional skills, propel winners to the top. Successful managers must be able to obtain support for their programs, develop cohesive teams, sell their ideas to a group, and gain the cooperation of other departments.

More than a third of the 30 successful Silicon Valley executives I interviewed, as part of my study of executive development programs, attributed their quantum career leaps to programs which increased their person-

al impact and taught them how to make significant changes in their behavior as leaders. Nearly 40 percent said mentors, who functioned as coaches, played an essential role in their careers. The remaining 25 percent said the most important part of their professional growth came from jobs that, at first, they struggled to perform.

A study of 10,000 graduates from Carnegie Institute of Technology showed that 15 percent of their success came from technical skills and 85 percent from their ability to deal with people. In a five-year study of Purdue University graduates, those with the highest grades earned just three percent a year more than those with the lowest grades. Graduates with strong interpersonal skills earned 35 percent more than those with low ratings.

Since senior managers have some interpersonal skills and achieve some measure of success, they may think that they can handle anything. In fact, they may not see the need to improve their effectiveness as leaders. They invariably are not inclined to attend three-day training programs. Nor do standard leadership programs bring about much change because they fail to address the managers' specific development issues.

### CHANGE IS TOUGH

All executives have tried, at various times, to change their management style without much success. Think of all those good ideas your managers picked up in training programs, ones they had every intention of installing back in their department, but never did. They didn't really drop the idea for lack of time or support, although those may have been their excuses. What actually happened was that they tried to superimpose new behaviors on top of old attitudes - and it didn't work.

For a smooth, successful, permanent change, an executive's beliefs, values and attitudes need to shift. This process of changing from the "inside out" is very

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much like creating a candle by dipping it repeatedly into hot wax. You begin with a wick, then add layer upon layer of candle wax. In the end, the wick is barely visible; yet without it, the candle would quickly sputter and go out. With it, the candle sheds light easily and infinitely. Similarly, by shifting attitudes buried under layers of behavior, changes endure.

Personalized Leadership Development empowers managers to change from the inside out, to ensure that changes in work habits and management style are permanent. This unique system is quite different from the support a manager might receive from a mentor or a human resources representative. These people provide useful advice and coaching, usually focused on solving a particular work problem. They rarely have the psychological skills or the time to work in depth with the manager on broader leadership issues, as he or she strives to make significant core changes.

The personalized development system provides in-depth assessment, feedback and support customized to the individual, the work group and the company. The program consists of nine sessions spread over four to five months. The first four sessions concentrate on the assessment of leadership and management skills and the identification of development areas. The last five sessions focus on coaching and counseling to strengthen the manager's talents and to ensure that targeted changes occur. At each session, we focus on internal shifts in attitudes and belief systems, which lead to observable changes in management style and organizational systems.

The sessions follow an eight-step CHANGING process.

**C** - Concretely describe the desired change. Identify a specific issue to work on in each session.

**H** - Honestly examine the motivation to change. How much do you want to change in this area? How much time, attention and thought are you willing to devote to this change?

**A** - Abandon the old behavior mentally. Examine the patterns underlying the problem. What would happen without this problem? What would replace it?

**N** - Name the change positively, as if it's already happened. State the change as precisely and simply as possible, so that you can easily repeat it as a reminder of the goal. This positive "self-talk" implants the goal in your mind.

**G** - Give attention to payoffs. Payoffs are the benefits that come to you because of a particular habit. Payoffs reinforce the old behaviors.

**I** - Imagine the past and observe how old patterns become general themes. For example, "I'll never be good enough to please Dad," gets shortened to "I'll never be good enough," or "whatever I do, it's never enough." This attitude may reveal itself in competitive behavior in which you try again and again to prove that you are "good enough."

**N** - Nail down the new behavior by mentally rehearsing it. Examine how you will react in the future and explore changes in management style and organizational systems. By imagining the "new me" functioning in remarkable ways in the future, you fine tune your mental picture to match the targeted change.

**G** - Graduate to the new behavior. Select an immediate work task and a longer-term project to practice the new attitude and skills. Identify specific actions and record them for future tracking.

Individual leadership development programs have yielded impressive results, including low turnover, an increased pool of candidates for management openings, significant cultural changes and fewer executives having troubling characteristics.

I'm convinced that executives can best refine their strengths and overcome personal problems through an individually tailored development program.

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