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'Leaders Develop Slowly In A Series Of Stages'***

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'Leaders Develop Slowly In A Series Of Stages'

Randy Slechta, President & CEO, Leadership Management International (LMI) shares his thoughts about leadership being a key area of employee engagement, and the stages of development of a leader



How do higher engagement scores impact businesses?

Studies have consistently shown significantly higher productivity, employee retention, employee wellness, higher revenues, and higher profitability for organizations with higher engagement scores. Engagement is essentially another term for motivation, in other words how much discretionary effort does an employee put into their job. This extra discretionary effort really makes the difference in organizational results.

Why is leadership a key ingredient in driving higher levels of employee engagement?

Engagement is predominantly created and driven by an employee's immediate leader. It is this relationship that is the number one factor in engagement levels. An employee's manager creates the bulk of an employee's experience with the organization. The big question is what kind of leadership does an employee's boss or supervisor utilize? So it is critical that effective leadership practices are implemented through the entire organization, not just at the executive level.

What do leaders in the digital age do to transform their culture?

The digital age has actually created more challenges for organizations. Unfortunately, culture is something that cannot be changed or transformed. Culture is the result of the many face-to-face interactions between employees of an organization. This is where real attitudes, mind-sets, beliefs and values are formed. Before the digital age, leaders and managers spent considerably more time in these interactions and thus were able to have more impact on their culture. With the advent of digital communication, leaders now spend considerably less time physically interacting with their teams. Consequently, culture has become much more difficult to change in this environment. It is imperative for leaders to spend more time with their teams if they ever hope to impact their culture.

What are the leadership development programs in India and expansion plans?

We have spent the last 50 plus years working with over 2 million leaders in 80 different countries, so we have learned a great deal about what works and what doesn't in developing effective leaders. The real key is that leaders are developed through a long-term process, not through short, isolated events or interventions.

We have discovered that leaders actually develop in a series of stages or steps. There are four primary stages of leader development.

First is learning to manage themselves and manage their time and priorities. We call this personal productivity.

Second is learning to lead themselves. This means developing a personal mission, clarifying their values, creating a productive work-life balance, and building a trustworthy character. We call this personal leadership.

Third is the ability to lead, engage, empower, coach and motivate others. We call this motivational leadership.

And fourth is being able to lead an entire organization to success. We call this strategic leadership.

It is like maturing as a person, you can't skip a step. What we have done is develop specific leadership development programs around these stages so that we can enable leaders to master and progress through the four stages. In India, we have been focusing on the first few stages and are just now rolling out the programs for the higher stages.

What is the leadership scenario in India, how can leaders be trained for the challenges to lead?

India's greatest resource is its people. The entire key to India's future success is its ability to access, mobilize and develop this incredible resource. Of course the only way to do that is through effective leadership.

India's challenge is that it has a long history of hierarchy, bureaucracy, and management. The goal is not to manage people, but rather to lead them. You can't manage people to higher engagement or motivation; you can only lead them there. So India must overcome some long

held beliefs and mind-sets about the leadership-management paradigm. You can't change mind-sets through a memo, or a speech, or a book, or a policy. This will only happen through a process specifically designed to change these mind-sets. All of our development programs have been designed and built on a methodology of changing attitudes to enable real culture change and leadership development.

One out of four leaders hired across the world is a woman, but they have a lesser working period. What can be done to promote women leadership and gender diversity?

I don't think the lesser working period is really an issue any more because the average work engagement for all people, including men has become much shorter. People are much more mobile and changing jobs and careers faster than ever. Women actually possess more of the soft skills and emotional intelligence necessary for effective leadership today. So it is not really a skill issue. The main issue seems to be mind-sets and old, out-dated traditions. By and large, women primarily need to develop the belief and confidence to become a leader - again this means a change in their mind-set.

What makes a good leader? How important is trust to leadership?

You can't just create a master list of traits and start ticking them off. There is not one perfect mould for effective leadership. The real key is to identify where a person is now -what are their strengths and weakness -and then develop an individualised plan to maximize their strengths and to minimize their weaknesses.

Everyone can be a leader at some level, and every person needs to further develop his or her leadership ability. The four stages I mentioned earlier are really the only constants in this process. It is an on-going journey for all of us!