

CORPORATED MANAGEMENT / HUMAN RESOURCES

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Talking HR
with GRAEME FIELD

To B or not to B...

EVERYONE knows this famous “misquotation” from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. In the play, Hamlet is musing on the merits of living or dying – but that is certainly not the purpose of this article.

Here, my two Bs stand for “Buy or Build...” now, that is the question. When it comes to leadership in an organisation, a question that is often asked by CEOs and their boards is “Are we better off trying to build our own leaders or should we just buy from the market?”

Not surprisingly, the best firms adopt both strategies – but around the region we are seeing greater emphasis being placed on “building leadership” from within the company. As a former CEO of mine was fond of saying, “This is the rice we have and we have to cook with it.”

Since building your leadership talent requires considerable investment from your company in terms of resources – people, time, opportunity costs and money – and it is not an easy thing to do, you need to make sure that you do the best possible job. How do you invest your money wisely, and really work to harness the rewards?

As research indicates (see my last column), the return on investment (ROI) for effective leadership is truly

very high, so the question is “How do you maximise the value of your investment?”

Here are some global, best-practice leadership development recommendations.

Leadership is not generic – there is no “one-size-fits-all” leadership model. Every organisation and company is unique and approaches its business in a different way. The best leadership development programmes are contextualised to the needs of the business or organisation. As such, leadership requirements – for each different organisation – need to be very clear at the start of any development programme.

What are you really looking for from your leadership team given the state and nature of your business and the competitive environment that it operates in? What skills, aptitudes and attitudes do they need? What characteristics do you want them to demonstrate?

Once the organisational requirements are clear, each member of the leadership team needs to know how they “stack up.” How are they doing – at this moment – with respect to the leadership requirements?

Ideally this should be assessed by the most powerful of tools – the Multi-level Review or 360! The 360 provides each participant with the feedback or view of the people who are in the very best place to observe

– peers, direct reports, customers and bosses. There is no running away from this feedback.

Armed with knowledge of their current standing, participants are ready to start their leadership development journey.

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Research shows that leadership development is “a process – not an event”. It takes time and practice to develop and hone new skills and attributes. The journey that we normally suggest takes about nine months to a year and starts with an individual understanding more about the individual’s natural leadership style and what it means to be an authentic leader.

During the programme, individuals can enhance their “gifts”, eliminate their blind-spots and develop the characteristics sought by their organisation.

In essence, they gain understanding of their “leadership brand” and make choices about how they can “grow their brand”.

In addition to learning more about

Leading Themselves, participants should spend time learning about Leading Others and Leading the Organisation as they progress on their journey.

Leadership Development journeys should be focused on creating lasting behavioural change back in the workplace – this is the fundamental measure of success for all programmes.

To achieve this, the best leadership development programmes build an element of coaching into the programme from the start. We have found that on-the-job practice and coaching is the necessary ingredient that facilitates the change in behaviour.

The real question is “How do the participants get the coaching that they require?” Are the most senior leaders of the organisation well-equipped to provide the coaching? Not usually. Either they don’t have the time or they don’t have the skills – or both! Ideally coaching is provided by internal supervisors and mentors and this can have a powerful impact.

For this reason, we always recommend that the leadership development journeys start “at the top” and cascade through the organisation – this provides the best situation for emerging leaders to experience developmental coaching from their supervisors.

Even if there is coaching from

internal resources, we also recommend at least four one-hour coaching sessions with an external coach for the duration of the programme. This provides a relatively objective, external sounding board and the opportunity to practise skills before trying them out in the workplace.

One final element that should be incorporated into the leadership development programme is an Action Learning Project.

This provides the participants with an opportunity to work on projects that are significant to the organisation. They offer participants the opportunity to develop strategic skills and can provide good ROI for the organisation. They also provide a venue for peer coaching and feedback and the chance to hone team leadership and team participation skills.

In summary, a contextualised, business-relevant journey containing coaching against clearly defined leadership attributes will do much to develop the leaders of tomorrow. Whether they will “B or not B” depends on the decisions you take today!

● Graeme Field believes that key skills such as strategic agility, managing vision and purpose, and motivating others can be learnt. These skills are important because as Warren G. Bennis says, “Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.”