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Leadership Sustainability

These two Alpha wolves survive by their wit and intelligence in a hostile natural environment, in a symbiotic social and hunting kinship with the opportunistic raven. What will ensure your survival and sustainability?

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Leadership Sustainability

How can leaders sustain their changes?



by Ken Shelton

RECENTLY I WAS ASKED TO preview and endorse a book by Dave Ulrich and Norm Smallwood, *Leadership Sustainability*. It goes beyond *Why* leadership matters and *What* makes effective leadership to address *How* leaders can sustain desired changes. The authors propose *seven disciplines* to help leaders finish what they start and deliver what they promise.

This invitation immediately invoked a memory. Some three years ago, I was seated in a large conference room with at least 1,000 other people, listening to Dave Ulrich. Suddenly he spotted me and asked, "Ken, what do you consider to be *the single most important issue* in leadership today?" My answer: *leadership sustainability*.

Later, Dave and his partner Norm Smallwood at the LD firm Results-Based Leadership not only addressed this mega-issue but nailed it. Hence, my endorsement: "This is the *definitive work* on the matter and an *instant classic* in the field."

Why do I consider *leadership sustainability* to be *the single most important issue* in leadership today? Because otherwise *leadership* becomes a short-term (one-term) show. Leaders (like President Obama) who win a second term must use that time to prove themselves as *leaders of sustainability*. This requires making tough decisions in a culture of truth and transparency.

Companies Not So Transparent

While organizations have become more open about their HR practices, they tend to remain tight-lipped about the criteria for high-potential or leadership development (LD) programs, according to AMA Enterprise. "Companies are twice as open about their business strategy or results of an employee survey than they are about their selective leadership programs—and *the secrecy is often counterproductive*," said *Sandi Edwards*, SVP for AMA Enterprise. "Such opportunities and criteria should be clear, well-defined, and communicated widely with a shared sense of openness and fairness. Leaders should make a genuine effort to inform everyone about the program criteria and leave open the possibility that oth-

ers might be selected at a future date (this is key to keeping top talent, since if they don't make the cut for a program, they know they'll have another chance)."

Keeping selection criteria confidential can make the LD process seem unfair or political. Companies that set the pace in LD are transparent, and make sure the process is fair. "There are periodic management talent reviews, assessments and performance reviews, and problem-solving task forces aligned with strategic initiatives in order to gauge the high-potential leadership pipeline. Depending on future corporate needs, the individuals selected should be prepared in a variety of ways to enhance these skills and opportunities for progression within the company."



Dave Ulrich

Seven Trends Influence LD

According to Edwards, the LD sector will be shaped by *seven trends* this year: 1) organizations will become more transparent and open about performance review criteria, changes in strategy, career advancement opportunities, high potential program selection, and management succession; 2) coaching will draw greater scrutiny—there will be fewer blank checks as organizations expect to see clear success criteria as part of any engagement to get real ROI in development; 3) demand for training in the basics will re-emerge—expect to see renewed demand to build communications skills, critical thinking, collaboration and creativity to improve employee productivity; 4) globalization will shape more LD programs—companies can't afford to lose ground in an integrated and competitive global marketplace; 5) companies will turn to training to build employee loyalty—management will use development as a means to improve retention and engagement; 6) the process of selecting candidates for high potential programs will become more open and ambitious individuals will enthusiastically volunteer for any LD offering; 7) learning will go mobile: Blended learning approaches will integrate the best of Web 2.0 learning programs and social media—accessible via both web and mobile devices—making LD opportunities highly flexible for the end user. Visit www.amanet.org.

LE
Ken Shelton
Editor since 1984

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Executive Excellence Publishing:

Ken Shelton, CEO, Editor-in-Chief
Sean Beck, Circulation Manager

Contributing Editors:

Chip Bell, Warren Bennis, Dianna Booher, Kevin Cashman, Marshall Goldsmith, Howard Guttman, Jim Kouzes, Jim Loehr, Tom Peters, Norm Smallwood

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For additional information on artwork by

Craig Kosak, please contact:

Greenwich Workshop

151 Main Street

Saymour, CT 06483

1-800-243-4246

www.greenwichworkshop.com

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Leadership Sustainability

Develop seven integrated disciplines.



by Dave Ulrich and Norm Smallwood

MOST GOOD LEADERS TRY TO BECOME better. Thousands of leaders: attend leadership training; receive performance reviews; get individual development plans; receive coaching with ideas on how to change their behavior and deliver better results; and complete a 360-degree feedback process with data on how they are seen by others. At the end, most leaders resolve to use their new insights and be more effective. Unfortunately, few implement these good intentions.

Leaders do not always finish what they start. At the end of every improvement effort, participants need *the discipline to do what they desire* and to *turn their aspirations into actions*.

Our purpose is to help leaders sustain the changes that they know they should make—that is, to support *leadership sustainability (LS)*. LS suggests shaping a culture and all its actions to enhance its reputation as a responsible member of its community and wise custodian of resources. LS has to show up in a leader's intentions and observable behaviors (actions).

We still see a gap between *what people know they should do* and *what gets done*. It's easy to become confused about what really works, and this *concept clutter* isn't helpful to leaders seeking to improve. So, we try to synthesize research from multiple fields into an integrated set of disciplines that can make the difference between *good intentions* and *effective action*.

Develop Seven Disciplines

Developing *leadership capability* (the capability to build future leaders) matters even more than developing individual competence. We find that LS depends on *seven disciplines*:

- **Simplicity**—*focusing on the key behaviors that will make the most difference on key issues*. Most leaders create to-do lists of things they should change—but they get overwhelmed when they

try to change them all at once. LS requires finding simplicity in the face of complexity and replacing concept clutter with simple resolve. It entails prioritizing the behaviors that matter most, shifting from analytics with data to action with determination, framing complex phenomena into simple patterns, and sequencing change.

- **Time**—*passing the calendar test by wisely allocating days, hours, moments*. Most leaders can tell us their priorities, but when we ask them to review their calendar for the last 30 to 90 days and show us how much time they spent on these priorities, we often see unnerving gaps between intention and reality. Effective leaders build their desired behaviors into their calendar. People attend to what they see leaders do far more than to what they hear them say.



LS shows up in who we spend time with, what issues we spend time on, where we spend our time, and how we spend our time. When leaders invest their time as carefully as their money, they're likely to make change happen.

- **Accountability**—*accepting responsibility; holding yourself (and others) accountable for keeping promises*. Cynicism occurs when leaders announce wonderful aspirations (vision, mission, and strategy statements), but fail to deliver. Over time, this cynicism breaks down trust and erodes commitment. LS requires leaders to take personal responsibility for *doing what they say*. Accountability increases when leaders expect and accept *personal commitments* from others and follow up on them. Leadership is sustainable when the leader's agenda becomes the personal agenda of others.

- **Resources**—*specific intangible resources that leaders enlist to support their desired changes and build an infrastructure of sustainability*. Self-coaching, expert-coaching, peer-coaching, and boss-coaching can

be woven together to create sustained change. Selection, promotion, career development, succession planning, performance review, and communication policies can be aligned with organization design to support leadership change.

- **Tracking**—*you get what you inspect, not what you expect; you do what you are rewarded for (and so does everyone else); and you shouldn't reward one thing while hoping for something different*. Leaders must measure their behavior and results in specific ways. Unless desired leadership behaviors and changes are translated into specific actions, quantified, and tracked, they're not likely to get done. Metrics for leadership behavior need to be transparent, easy to measure, timely, and tied to consequences. LS can be woven into scorecards (and become its own scorecard) to ensure that leaders monitor how they're doing.

- **Melioration**—*a complex of actions and attitudes designed to make things better*. Leaders *meliorate* when they improve by learning from mistakes and failures and demonstrate resilience. Progress is not linear. We try, fail (or succeed), try again, fail again. When we learn from each attempt, the outcomes we intend will eventually happen. LS requires that leaders master the principles of learning: to experiment frequently, to reflect always, to become resilient, to face failure, to not be calloused to success, and to improvise continually.

- **Emotion**—*a personal passion for the changes that need to be made*. Sustained change is a matter of the heart as well as the head; it needs a strong emotional agenda and not simply an intellectual agenda, however logical and cogent it may be. Action without passion will not long endure, nor will passion without action. Leaders ensure emotion by drawing on their deeper values and finding meaning in the work they do. LS occurs when leaders not only know but feel what they should do to improve. This passion increases when leaders see their desired changes as part of their personal identity and purpose, when their changes will shape their relationships with others, and when their changes will shift the culture of their work setting.

We introduce an *application audit* to apply to these disciplines to sustain your progress. To make change your behavior or the behavior of others, use this audit to ensure that *desired changes* are introduced—and then stick. **LE**

Dave Ulrich and Norm Smallwood are partners in RBL Group and coauthors of Sustainability Leadership. Visit www.RBLGroup.com.

ACTION: *Develop these seven disciplines.*