



Hay Hill Highlights

From managing to leading



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Hay Hill Partners is a business coaching and executive mentoring firm focusing exclusively on working one to one with business leaders. Our clients are typically board or Exco members and their direct reports. The strength of our approach lies in the combination of our own business experience, our coaching expertise and the insights we gain from working with clients across multiple sectors.

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In brief

The transition from business manager to business leader is not an easy one. The skills that take you to middle management are rarely the skills that are required to be a successful leader. Skills aside, being a leader requires a level of self revelation that can be uncomfortable for many people.

This booklet provides a practical guide for anyone seeking to define or refine their leadership style. It outlines a menu of actions, behaviours and disciplines that are relevant for seasoned leaders as well as those moving into their first leadership roles. It is a synthesis of some of the material coaching clients find useful and includes insights from executive and coaching experience.

The literature on the subject of leadership suggests there are six characteristics that followers look for in their leaders:

Integrity
Vision
Decisiveness

Persistence
Competence
Modesty

Our menu outlines sixteen actions, behaviours and disciplines. It is intended to be an *a la carte*, not a *menu formule*, and allows individual leaders to develop styles of leadership that suit them and their organisations. It is broken down into four sections – Leading yourself, Leading others, Leading your team and Leading your organisation. None of the items on our menu is individually particularly difficult to enact. Anyone who has been successful enough to reach a senior leadership position will almost certainly be able to master each of them. The keys to success, particularly sustained success, are in combining them and in having the discipline to stick to them, especially when under pressure. We hope our menu of actions, behaviours and disciplines will support your transition to leader.

LEADING YOUR ORGANISATION

- Set a vision
- Re-evaluate and re-align regularly
- Confront complexity
- Be decisive

LEADING YOURSELF

- Be an exemplar
- Know yourself
- Manage your energy
- Be courageous

LEADING YOUR TEAM

- Craft your team
- Delegate effectively
- Embrace difficult conversations
- Be a coach

LEADING OTHERS

- Practise versatility
- Seek ideas from everywhere
- Stay in touch
- Fly high but dive deep

From managing to leading

Put 'leadership' into Google and you get around 126 million results; refine your search to 'business leadership' and you still get 55.7 million hits. Unmanageable volume, varying quality and excessive hype make it difficult for anyone wanting to develop leadership skills to know where to start. This booklet is a synthesis of some of the materials coaching clients find useful and includes insights from executive and coaching experience. It is not intended to be all encompassing but to provide a practical guide for those seeking to define or refine their leadership styles.

That there is a vast volume of writing on the subject of leadership is hardly surprising. However defined, it is critical to organising groups and to prioritising collective effort over individuals'. When exercised well, it can be a force for mutual benefit; when abused, it can be a source of evil. In business, it can boost organisations' prospects and profitability or contribute to their decline and failure.

One of the reasons why many people find it more difficult to be a leader than a manager is that leading requires a level of self revelation that can be uncomfortable. Managers control people and processes using some combination of superior knowledge, greater experience and higher hierarchical status to get tasks completed. Leaders inspire people to want to follow them and to commit to joint endeavour and common goals. Inspiring others to actions that are not necessarily in their immediate personal interests involves influencing, persuading and cajoling – skills that reflect who you are and how you interact with others more than what it says on your CV or business card.

Inspiring and persuading rather than commanding and controlling have never been as important to the success of organisations as they are today. A number of factors have, in combination, altered the balance of power between leaders and followers. These include the increased importance of service and knowledge

based industries; the de-layering of many organisations; the end of 'jobs for life'; globalisation; and the transformation of the way we work and access information brought about technological innovation. The effect has been to give followers, especially the most talented, more choice and they now expect to be involved, developed and inspired rather than managed and organised.

Much of the literature on leadership is of limited use to those seeking to develop as leaders. A large section of it falls into the 'Super Hero' genre that chronicles the exploits of former CEOs, politicians and sportsmen and women but glosses over inspiration and persuasion. The academic genre is more useful and provides an understanding of the characteristics followers look for in their leaders. Six characteristics of effective leaders have emerged from decades of analysis:

Integrity. Credibility as a leader is closely linked to perceived integrity. Walking the talk, exercising high personal standards and delivering on commitments contribute to how others rate leaders.

Vision. Effective leaders create a vision of the future that is demonstrably beneficial and help others to understand how their actions can contribute to success.

Decisiveness. Leaders are action orientated as well as visionary. This is especially important in times of crisis or turnaround but relevant at all times.

Persistence. Leaders who achieve impact over longer periods the ability to remain focussed and exhibit a marked degree of dogged persistence.

Competence. Least surprisingly, being demonstrably competent and able to contribute to the collective endeavour are important to gaining and maintaining legitimacy as a leader.

Modesty. Probably most surprisingly to many people, most leaders who have achieved sustained business success tend to be modest, humble and self effacing as well as clear and firm.

The relevance of these six characteristics is verified by multiple sources. Derived from studies of modern organisational leadership, they also fit with anthropological research and resonate with the experience of business coaches working with senior executives across a variety of organisations and industry sectors.

Knowing what characteristics followers respond well to is one thing; knowing how to develop them yourself is another. The following menu provides a framework of actions, behaviours and disciplines that will underpin leaders' development. The menu is broken down into four sections – Leading yourself, Leading others, Leading your team and Leading your organisation. Every item will need to be crafted to suit each individual leader, their organisation and their particular circumstances. Although generally not listed in any order of importance, the first in each section – Be an exemplar, Practise versatility, Craft your team and Set a vision – are the four standout tenets. Of the rest, some will be more relevant than others at certain times, but each will need to be addressed at appropriate times to achieve sustained impact.

Leading yourself

Many people derail in leadership positions because they fail to understand that the skills and styles of behaviour that served them well on their way to the top will almost certainly not be those required to deliver future success. So spend time thinking about what changes are needed and consider the following four disciplines that can help you put yourself in a strong position before you focus on other people, your team and your business as a whole.

Be an exemplar. Nothing will influence your effectiveness as a leader more than how you behave as an individual. Remember

Gandhi's dictum 'be the change you want to see' and model the behaviour you want from others in your own. Exercise high standards in everything you do, be visible to staff, customers and other key stakeholders, take responsibility for problems and for finding solutions, manage your time effectively and respect others', keep your word and honour promises – and explain personally if you cannot. Be watchful for any temptation to isolate yourself when you are under pressure – it is at those moments when your team, your staff and your business will need and value your leadership most.

All encompassing and all important, your own behaviour and the way you interact with people will define how others rate your integrity. Like trust, one break outweighs many virtuous actions, so constant vigilance is required.

Know yourself. Being aware of your strengths and weaknesses, understanding how you learn and work best and identifying how you can maximise your contribution are strands of knowledge that underpin leadership. Put simply, you are more likely to succeed if you play to your strengths.

Make time to reflect on your own performance and working style. Ask yourself what it is that makes you unique as a leader. Work out how you process information most effectively – by reading or discussing? Be clear about how you like to make decisions – alone, in consultation with others individually or in a team setting? Obtaining candid feedback from others becomes more difficult as you become more senior, but is even more important. Make sure you seek it formally and informally. Identify a selection of people – not just those who you know will say what you want to hear – and empower them to comment on your performance, behaviour and development needs.

Once you have this knowledge, act on it. Remain vigilant about building your strengths and managing your weaknesses. Allocate your time, energy and emotion to your key strategic

priorities and to where you are uniquely positioned to have impact. Reflect your strengths and weaknesses in your selection of the team around you, ensuring that others complement you, not mirror you.

Manage your energy. Business leadership is often lonely, stressful and wearing. The constant pressure to deliver results, the relentless barrage of communication and the unforgiving schedules can easily lead to loss of focus or, at worst, burnout. Knowing that energy, resilience and persistence are all highly valued leadership characteristics, prioritise maintaining your mental, physical and emotional stamina.

This should involve carving out time for other interests, for exercising and for commitments to family and friends. Some leaders feel concerned that this allocation of time to aspects of life outside work may be interpreted by others as lack of commitment. The reverse is more often the case – colleagues respect leaders who keep their work in perspective. Maintaining balance in your life can provide space for renewal and sets a positive tone for others.

Be courageous. Taking the responsibility of leadership is not for everyone. To do it well requires courage. Courage to be yourself, to be passionate, to do 'the right thing', to change your mind when circumstances alter, to acknowledge that you do not have all the answers, to admit your mistakes and to take decisions, often without the time or the level of information you would ideally like. Position yourself to be courageous – with a strong team, robust working relationships, solid support structures around you and time to think.

Leading others

Remember that being an exemplar means that followers will judge you on the nature of your interaction with them. The following four disciplines can help you frame how you want to be seen by staff.

Practise versatility. There will probably be far more stakeholder groups, many with multiple agendas, requiring your attention than you are used to. Understanding that different people, different problems and different situations require different styles of leadership is an important early step for leaders. Spend time mapping your stakeholders thoroughly and to understanding what others need and want from you.

Over time you will develop a sophisticated mix of styles. Inspiring will be the ideal in many instances, but there will also be times when people will just need to be told what the decision is going to be. Daniel Goleman's seminal paper *Leadership That Gets Results* outlines six styles - coercive, authoritative, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter and coaching - that can be deployed to tackle any business situation. You do not need to master all six, but practise using them, particularly those with which you feel naturally less comfortable. Eventually you will build a habit of seamlessly adjusting your style to suit different settings.

Seek ideas from everywhere. When hierarchy was more potent, people 'at the top' made decisions and staff implemented them. Globalisation, social and corporate change and technological innovation have radically altered that. Leaders now need to understand that they are in charge, but not in control. Remaining steadfastly open minded to new ideas, particularly to other people's new ideas, is thus important. This in turn requires humility and being comfortable with acknowledging that senior management is not omnipotent.

Stay in touch. A common failing of leaders is losing touch with the real workings and zeitgeist of their organisations. Developing antennae that help you understand what is really going on internally and externally is important. Using them consistently is even more critical.

Having an internal network of people who help you keep in

touch can be a potent ploy. Some organisations, particularly in the technology and media sectors, have reverse mentoring where a junior member of staff mentors Exco members on products and market developments. External networks are also important. Having relationships with competitors, advisors, regulators and commentators is positive for leaders and their organisations. However achieved, staying in touch with the realities of your organisation and its markets is critical.

Fly high but dive deep. Leaders must achieve a very fine balance - be sufficiently 'big picture' to show that they are strategic and confident in their teams, but detailed enough to demonstrate competence. To achieve this, avoid taking responsibility for tasks that should be delegated, but get involved in projects, client or customer meetings and initiatives that touch every aspect of the business. While doing this, deepen your own understanding by asking open questions, provide insights that stem from your unique perspective and help staff understand how their roles contribute to customer satisfaction and organisational success.

Leading your team

Some of the most common problems we observe in our clients' working lives and careers stem from their leadership of their top teams. Leading an executive team is not a one off process - recruiting the right people is a prerequisite of success, but retaining, motivating and moulding the team are on-going requirements.

Craft your team. Be as ruthless as is feasible in selecting the people around you. Compromise will sometimes be needed, but should be avoided unless absolutely necessary. Be mindful of any temptation to select people based purely on skills or, conversely, purely on their ability to work with others. A balance will be required. Keep an eye on your own succession and target people who will be contenders for your position

- it will underpin the quality of the team and keep you on your toes.

Seek diverse and complementary skills and encourage constructive challenge, particularly of your own views. Be clear about the team's role, responsibilities and agenda - what is it that only the top team working together can achieve?

Remember that just as you are an exemplar of how individuals should behave, the way your top team works will be an exemplar to other groups. So, ensure that the team regularly reflects on process as well as on specific tasks. Address how it should work and what its values should be. Make sure the processes in place address where it should seek input from and how it should interact with the rest of the organisation. Refresh regularly.

Delegate effectively. Delegating is not easy and the high performers who take up leadership roles often find it particularly difficult. It can be frustrating to delegate to people who may be less experienced, less efficient and even just less able to undertake tasks. But the evidence is clear - failing to delegate is a key cause of failure of leaders. Few things de-motivate talented people more than being led by a micro manager.

Delegating well will allow you time to work on your strategic priorities and will build trust. As you become more senior it will often need you to acknowledge your lack of specialist knowledge and consequent reliance on others' expertise. So focus on the idea that your role is *to get things done, not to do everything* and therefore that you should concentrate on motivating others rather than undertaking tasks.

Delegating effectively requires judgement about how each individual will respond best. But be as clear and explicit as you can be and remember that you are appointing someone

else to act on your behalf. You need to agree the level of authority you are happy to delegate and your subordinate is happy to receive. You also need to agree on what your subordinate will be accountable for - and remember that when delegating authority and responsibility you are not abdicating your ultimate authority and accountability.

Embrace difficult conversations. Few people find giving critical feedback easy, but it is essential. Be courageous in making it a natural part of your relationships with your team, complemented by seeking feedback for yourself. Be factual, unemotional, consistent and demonstrably constructive. Be rigorous in clarifying expectations as it is misunderstandings of these that very often lie at the heart of underperformance.

Be a coach. While micro managing is a career derailer, coaching your team can be a booster. Make yourself available and accessible for people to ask for advice and support. Aim for dialogue over download and use probing, open questions to facilitate colleagues' learning. Regularly review development plans and show your interest in furthering others' careers through challenging and stretching assignments. Use these relationships to encourage your top talent to make connections - refer them to other people internally and externally. The trust, respect and loyalty you will generate from this will improve performance in the short and medium term and lead to the most talented people wanting to work with you in the longer term.

Leading your organisation

Attempting to provide a guide to business leadership in four thousand words is ambitious; claiming to include business management would be preposterous. The following tenets are not about *what* you should do with your business but highlight four topics that only leaders can influence.

Set a vision. Successful leaders create a vision of where their organisations are going that staff can rally around. The vision should be ambitious but achievable and be demonstrably positive for the organisation, its clients or customers, its staff and wider stakeholders. It should also address multiple timeframes. One CEO we know has ‘sprint’, ‘middle distance’ and ‘marathon’ priorities for the next 12 months, 3 years and 5 years respectively to help everyone focus on the appropriate pace of change.

Evidence suggests that senior executives consistently over estimate the effectiveness of their communication of their vision. The best leaders work hard on getting buy-in from key staff – those who influence others. This often involves including a selection of people in the original crafting process, holding regular formal and informal ‘town hall’ meetings and articulating a small number of priorities that everyone can work to.

Walk around your organisation and test out if staff “get it”. Ask yourself ‘Would all staff be able to name my top priorities for the business if asked today?’ and ‘Would all staff understand how what they do is important to my vision?’ Be realistic with your assessment and craft new ways of communicating if the answer to either question is anything short of a definite ‘Yes’.

Re-evaluate and re-align regularly. Leaders and their organisations can become stale. To avoid this, regularly consider if the design of your business still addresses its key success factors optimally. Ask yourself ‘How different would it be if I was starting afresh?’ and ‘What could I change now to bring it closer to optimal design?’ Challenge your team and other staff along the same lines in order to minimise complacency. Remind them that you and they need to reinvent yourselves regularly in order to stay ahead of changing markets.

Confront complexity. Many businesses are inclined towards complication and complexity. Senior leaders are uniquely positioned to challenge this and to insert simplicity and

common sense instead. Make it clear that you value simplicity and make it a requirement of communication with you. Try asking people ‘How would you describe this to someone you met at a party?’ as a way getting them to think differently.

Be decisive. Having a style of leadership that favours delegation, feedback and seeking ideas from everyone should not be confused with being consensual or decision averse. As a leader you are required to take decisions, often on a broader range of issues and with less information and time than you are used to. This may feel particularly difficult when you are first in a senior leadership role – it often takes time to get used to the need to take big decisions, the pace and the pressure. But get used to it you must as, along with micro managing, being indecisive is a top derailer of leaders.

Discipline yourself to identify what decisions need to be taken (and those that do not), when they need to be taken, whether you should be taking them, what information and input you need and what levers you have in place to make things happen. Also make it clear to your team that you expect them to do the same – you must not become a decision log jam.

No one will become an effective leader by merely reading this pamphlet, nor any other part of the mountain of writing on the subject. Each individual’s appropriate style of leadership will only emerge from repeated practise. The menu of sixteen actions, behaviours and disciplines outlined here provides a framework for practice. None of the items is individually particularly difficult to enact. Anyone who has been successful enough to reach a senior leadership position will almost certainly be able to master each of them. The keys to success, particularly sustained success, are in combining them and in having the discipline to stick to them, especially when under pressure. Having an appropriate confidante, sounding board, mentor or coach may help, but identifying how you can feed your own persistence is the ultimate challenge for a leader.

Sixteen questions to ask yourself

Ask yourself how much you agree or disagree with the following statements and rank yourself on a on a 1 to 5 scale - where 1 is 'strongly disagree' and 5 is 'strongly agree':

1. My personal behaviour at work consistently reflects how I would like my staff to behave **1 2 3 4 5**

2. I am clear how I work best and how I can make the biggest contribution to my organisation **1 2 3 4 5**

3. I allocate sufficient time in my life to building and rebuilding my physical and emotional stamina **1 2 3 4 5**

4. I am courageous in my business decisions **1 2 3 4 5**

5. I am adept at flexing my approach to different people and situations to reflect my objectives **1 2 3 4 5**

6. I regularly ask open questions of my team and staff and seek new ideas from others **1 2 3 4 5**

7. I have a clear understanding of the culture and politics of my organisation **1 2 3 4 5**

8. I regularly get involved in internal projects and initiatives and external networks that allow me to understand my organisation's current and future business environment **1 2 3 4 5**

9. I allocate enough time and energy to crafting, moulding and managing my top team **1 2 3 4 5**

10. I delegate effectively and give clear indications of the authority and responsibility I expect people to take **1 2 3 4 5**

11. I give my direct reports regular, timely and clear feedback **1 2 3 4 5**

12. I act as a coach to my key staff **1 2 3 4 5**

13. I set a vision for the organisation that the majority of staff understand and can act upon **1 2 3 4 5**

14. I regularly re-evaluate and re-align the design of my organisation **1 2 3 4 5**

15. I make a conscious effort to confront unnecessary complexity in my organisation **1 2 3 4 5**

16. I am mindful of the need to take decisions and act upon that knowledge in my work **1 2 3 4 5**

Make a note of your scores and re-evaluate yourself after 3 or 6 months of practicing the actions, behaviours and disciplines discussed above.

Bibliography and further reading

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Acknowledgements

From managing to leading was compiled by Robin Hindle Fisher with help and input from clients and colleagues. In addition to being a partner at Hay Hill Partners, Robin is a non executive director of Ruffer LLP and a Sloan Fellow at London Business School.

Huge thanks go to the many people who contributed to this pamphlet. In particular, to the small number of clients who kindly reviewed early drafts and to Professor Richard Jolly of London Business School for his inspiration and input.

About Hay Hill Partners

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