

5 MISTAKES LEADERS MAKE

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LEADERSHIP IS A TRANSFORMATION

The journey to leadership requires a transformation.

In the ideal world, a new leader perfectly understands and starts performing the activities of the leadership role, monitors the results, and moves the followers forward to success. In reality, it is a process that takes time and requires a transition.

MY STORY

In six months, I had gone from being responsible for myself and my own annual sales production to a budget 325 percent larger and nine employees. I walked into my boss's office to drop off a copy of a report. That's when I saw the copy of my performance appraisal.

"my boss said I was struggling; I wasn't succeeding in my new leadership position."

I began to read it and felt the heat of anxiety overwhelm me. I was sick to my stomach. As I read through the report, it didn't seem to matter that I had been doing my best and working diligently for the past six months. The fact was that on the appraisal, my boss said I was struggling; I wasn't succeeding in my new leadership position. I knew what I read on the appraisal in many aspects was accurate. I wasn't getting projects done, hadn't established my voice as a leader and wasn't managing my time well. It certainly wasn't from a lack of trying, but I was nevertheless coming up short. Based on my poor performance review, the decision was made to enroll me, a struggling young manager, into a leadership training program. That experience changed my life! I took in the information in that class. I studied it, applied it, and practiced it over and over again, until it became a part of me. Once I learned the correct processes, I became a very capable and successful manager. Based on my own experience and those of the clients I've coached over the years, I am going to share the top five mistakes most new managers make while transitioning into a capable leader.

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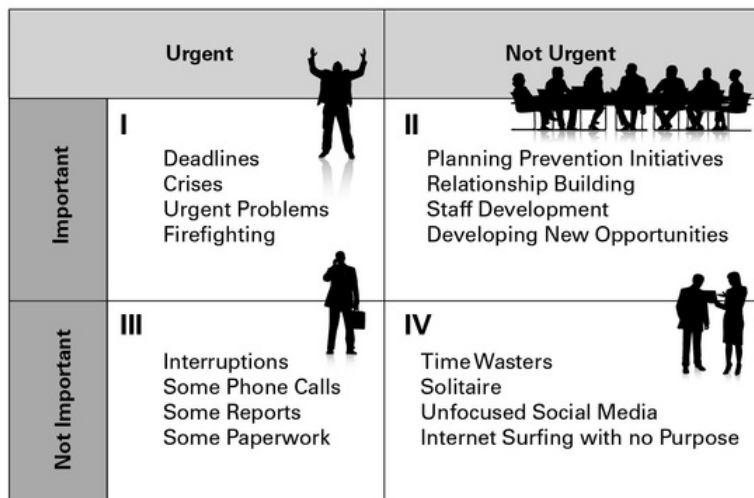
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MISTAKE #1 - SPENDING TIME ON THE WRONG THINGS



Most leaders will lean toward spending time on things they know and are familiar with in their area of expertise. Even though I was a top performer as a salesperson, those experiences did not provide me with the tools I needed to be successful in a management role. Initially, after getting my promotion, it was difficult to relinquish my clients and their advertising projects, because those were the only things I knew really well. As a high-performing sales rep, I enjoyed the achievement of selling and bringing in the revenue. It was difficult to give up working on day-to-day advertising activities in the field.

Typically, a new leader takes on a new title but keeps many of the duties from the previous position. Pretty soon, however, the new leader receives assignments. But if that new leader hasn't learned the skills to take the lead, he or she will scratch his or her head with no real clue as to how to approach these manager type projects. A new leader might take a stab at trying to start the project, but soon realizes that he or she is dropping balls in other areas of the job responsibilities. Pretty soon, the leader will receive another project, then another, and eventually he or she feels buried with no idea how to dig out of this huge hole of unfinished projects and has lost that feeling of accomplishment experienced in the former position. So what to do? The new leader begins doing more of what is already known, the old position, at the expense of current responsibilities.



Original concept by Charles E. Hummel.

One of the first methods we discuss in my leadership program is time. Participants learn about Charles Hummel's four quadrants known as the Tyranny of the Urgent. The first quadrant is the urgent and important quadrant, where many leaders spend most of their time. This is the quadrant I refer to as firefighting. Everything is important, and you have to deal with every thing now! The second quadrant is the important but not urgent quadrant. This is where I aim to get participants to spend more time, because time spent in this quadrant usually improves overall performance in the leader's role. The third quadrant is based on time spent on things that are urgent but not important. This might entail activities a leader perceives as interruptions or important to others. The fourth quadrant is not

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important and not urgent. This would include things like surfing the internet with no real purpose or playing games. I have seen firsthand that when a leader begins to shift time allocation to more time spent in the important but not urgent quadrant, his or her ability to become proactive versus reactive is significant.

MISTAKE #2 - NOT ADDRESSING PROBLEMS



One of the main areas in which I see leaders struggle is in budgeting time to address problems. Many leaders have not learned how to dedicate some time in their day for planning, gathering data on problem areas of their business, and assessing performance issues. In other words, they don't spend enough time working on things that are important but not urgent. As a result, the important projects assigned to them for implementation often fall short or are left completely undone. When asked, "Why not?" most managers would respond, "Because I was too busy." Skilled leaders know how to implement change. This process begins with having a continuous improvement mindset and identifying areas of an organization that are not performing well or wanting to take an area of the organization to the next level. Best practices in this area show participants how to analyze problems, gather facts associated with the problems, and then brainstorm problem statements in a positive and safe environment. Learning to facilitate a meeting like this and consistently engaging staff to participate are important tools for every leader who must determine how to solve problems and implement change.

MISTAKE #3 - NOT BEING CLEAR ON EXPECTATIONS



One of the biggest reasons being a leader is so complex is that the role changes. New leaders move from being responsible for their own set of activities and results to understanding the activities and results of every person who reports to them. In this new role, not only are leaders responsible for understanding the activities and expected results for each position in their area of responsibility, but they also need to be able to see and communicate how all the jobs tie into the big picture of the organization. If leaders don't have clarity on the roles in their area of responsibility and are not able to communicate clearly what success looks like in these jobs, there will likely be low performance and a high level of disengagement among the people in this department. Participants in my leadership program are asked to write down the reason their jobs exist. This helps them understand the bigger picture of how their roles fit into the organization and its goals. Participants write down all the activities they perform in their roles. Next, we organize the activities into results categories. We then establish a desired performance measurement for each category. This is where the rubber meets the road in this whole process. Each area of responsibility needs a measurement to gauge whether progress is being made. Once leaders create this document with their employees and monitor the activities and results of each individual, they have created the necessary structure to create clear expectations and high performance.

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Most leaders don't use a consistent process for delegation.

MISTAKE #4 - NOT DELEGATING



It has been my observation that in addition to not letting go of the work psychologically, most leaders don't use a consistent process for delegation. I usually start the group portion of any training meeting with a success story. One day, I started the session by asking, “Who would be willing to share a success story?” The leader of one of the product divisions said, “I will.” I was pleased that he had volunteered, since we had spent his last individual coaching meeting working on a delegation plan to transfer some of the customer service work he was performing to an experienced customer service person. He said the meeting went well, and he was confident she would do a great job. I asked him, “What did you do differently?” At first he didn't really get what I was asking him. I asked him again, “What did you have to do differently to accomplish this delegation project?” He responded very bluntly, “I quit being such a control freak! I couldn't believe the honesty. I thought it was a huge breakthrough for him and for his company. Using a specific form, writing down the expected results, and communicating with the delegation recipient throughout the process leads to consistent success. When leaders consistently use a process for delegation and follow up, they are finally able to perform at a higher level and be more strategic in their role.

MISTAKE #5 - NOT HOLDING PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE



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But, not holding employees accountable can lead to low morale, poor performance, and high turnover.

Many leaders are so overwhelmed with their leadership responsibilities that coaching employees to a higher level of performance seems outside the realm of possibility. With little training, coaching puts most people outside their comfort zone. But, not holding employees accountable can lead to low morale, poor performance, and high turnover. It's likely the largest line item in most budgets is payroll, so it's important for leaders to gain the confidence and skills to conduct directive coaching meetings to maintain accountability and supportive coaching meetings to discuss performance areas and developmental opportunities. It is very tempting to ignore poor performance issues or even challenge high performers, so it's important for leaders to learn the steps of the coaching conversation and to stay in their role as coach. As a matter of fact, the process of supportive coaching is about 90 percent listening and 10 percent summarizing and asking the next question. Coaching can be uncomfortable and counterintuitive. Leaders are encouraged to carry a three by five card that says, "Coaching is 90 percent listening" as a reminder of the importance of listening.

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When leaders are supported during their transition to leadership, they can easily avoid these five mistakes.



SUMMARY

Develop high-performing leaders.

Developing high-performing leaders is about transformation. It's about supporting your leaders through their transition.

When leaders are supported during their transition to leadership they can easily avoid these five mistakes.

Taking a professional development program over a period of time helps leaders learn and apply methods in the workplace and improve performance in your organization.

An individual leadership development program could be just the thing to help your busy leader increase productivity, improve efficiency, and deliver improved customer satisfaction for your organization.

For more information about developing high performing leaders, visit www.fairchildbusinesscoaching.com

