How to Build Your IT Leadership Pipeline

An Inside Perspective from a Leadership Expert

New Horizons®
Computer Learning Centers

WHERE AND HOW WILL I ACQUIRE MY NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS?

This is a common question on the minds of many executives across all sectors. Of course, understandably so, since experienced leaders of the Baby Boomer generation continue to retire at a pace of 10,000 per day, while only 7% of organizations believe they are properly equipped to transition their millennial workforce into leaders.

When executives look to grow the leadership abilities within their organization, they can accomplish this in one of two ways: Search outside the organization—recruiting and hiring seasoned leaders, often with no true knowledge of their business or their industry; or, they can build a pipeline of talented professionals equally capable in leading the organization, and arguably better qualified, as these individuals already understand and embrace the goals of their business.

Robert Stillman is a seasoned instructor with over 25 years of experience in Sales, Marketing, Project Management, and IT Management. He transitioned to adult education in 2011, and now primarily focuses on Leadership and Professional Development.

Over the course of his career, Robert has provided learning solutions for many notable clients, including: Microsoft, Google, Best Buy, Solar City, Pepsi Cola General Bottlers, United Airlines, Cook Composites, Marketstar, and the Department of Homeland Security.

Currently, Robert is the lead instructor of New Horizons Center for Leadership and Development, an updated curriculum which includes more than 25 courses that emphasize the benefits of communication, interpersonal, leadership, and management skills.

As a designer and facilitator of leadership and development programs, I wanted to take the opportunity to reflect and share some of the insights I've garnered from over 25 years of experience, both as a business professional and as an instructor.

Ultimately, the goal of this paper is to provide executives with answers to the following: What is the importance of building and developing a leadership pipeline? Which competencies drive better performing leaders? How do organizations successfully implement a learning program that will help build and develop your leadership pipeline?

THE NEED FOR BUILDING AN IT LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

Many companies spend countless resources (money, time, human capital) looking outside for talent; however, a more effective approach may be to build your bench of future leaders from within your organization. You can accomplish this by identifying, fostering, and nurturing internal talent, i.e. filling your leadership pipeline.

I'll let the figures below paint a clear picture of the current state of leadership:

87%

87% of organizations do not believe they have future leaders identified to fill critical roles.*

85%

Skilled leaders are in short supply, with 85% of executives not confident in their leadership pipelines.**

14%

Skilled leaders are in short supply, with 85% of executives not confident in their leadership pipelines.*

89%

In a Deloitte study of 7,000 organizations, 89% of executives rated "strengthening the leadership pipeline" an urgent issue and spend nearly $14 billion a year on learning and development.****

28%

Despite the billions of dollars that companies spend each year on leadership development, 28% of companies reported weak or very weak leadership pipelines.†

7%

Experienced leaders of the Baby Boomer generation continue to retire at a pace of 10,000 per day, while only 7% of organizations believe they are "excellent" at building millennial leaders.‡

Natural-born leaders can be difficult to find, but shifting the focus to developing leaders, instead of recruiting them, can ensure your organization has talented leaders for years to come.

LEADERSHIP IS ROOTED IN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

As an instructor at New Horizons, our proven approach to developing great leaders is embedded in Emotional Intelligence (EI).

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to understand and manage your own emotions, as well as those of the people around you. Professionals with a high level of emotional intelligence know what they're feeling, what their emotions mean, and how these emotions can affect others.

According Daniel Goleman, a psychologist, science journalist, and best-selling author, **"80-90% of the competencies that differentiate top performers are in the domain of emotional intelligence."** This idea is also echoed by the Harvard Business Review: **"Executives who fail to develop self-awareness risk falling into an emotionally deadening routine that threatens their true selves. Indeed, a reluctance to explore your inner landscape not only weakens your won motivation but can also corrode your ability to inspire others."**
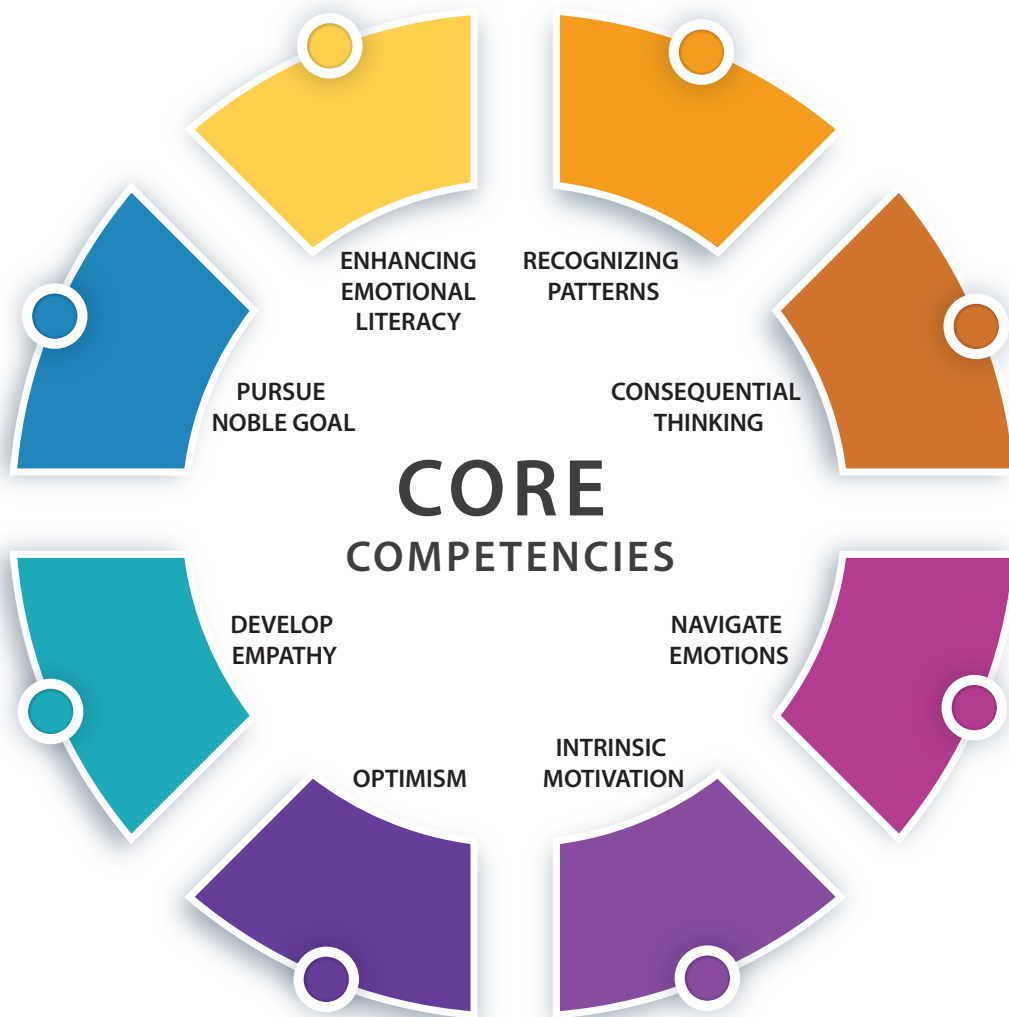
For leaders, having emotional intelligence is essential for success. After all, who is more likely to succeed: a leader who shouts at their team when under stress, or a leader who stays in control, and calmly assesses the situation?

80-90%

A FOCUS ON 8 CORE COMPETENCIES

Leadership competencies are leadership skills and behaviors that contribute to superior performance. By using a competency-based approach to leadership, organizations can better identify and develop their next generation of leaders.

For many organizations, identifying the leadership competencies that are most critical to success in various positions is an enormous challenge. However, there are eight core competencies that have, over the years, been demonstrated to impact the performance of almost any leader.

ENHANCING EMOTIONAL LITERACY

RECOGNIZING PATTERNS

PURSUE NOBLE GOAL

CONSEQUENTIAL THINKING

CORE
COMPETENCIES

DEVELOP EMPATHY

NAVIGATE EMOTIONS

OPTIMISM

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Again, these eight core competencies are rooted in emotional intelligence:

1. Enhancing Emotional Literacy – In study after study, the ability to harness the energy of our emotions and, thus, have more mastery over ourselves starts with engaging the cognitive part of our brains. In practicing emotional literacy, we become more aware of the nuanced threads of emotions that run in our bodies. Emotions are valuable; they trigger biochemical storms within us, and these storms become our allies when we get better at identifying what they are at any given time. Accurately "reading" the emotional data is essential for being intelligent with feelings, both understanding and being able to manage them.

Still, there are extremes to emotional literacy: At the unaware end, a leader can get overwhelmed by them and it can make them irrational. They default to ruling by numbers as they historically treat their emotions as a sign of weakness. At the other end, a strong emotional vocabulary enables a sense of insight and mastery. Such leaders can express emotional ideas or connect on an intuitive basis more easily.

2. Recognizing Patterns – By acknowledging emotions, we become better prepared to understand what we "do" with them. By acknowledging frequently recurring reactions and behaviors, we can better set ourselves up to respond with more intentionality. All humans have "hot-buttons" that get pressed from time to time. If left to our instinct, we follow patterns that bring about misunderstanding, discord, and fear. Recognizing patterns more effectively can set leaders up for real self-mastery.

3. Consequential Thinking – Applying consequential thinking means that we are more intentional in evaluating the costs and benefits of our choices. It is key in managing our impulses and being less reactive. As leaders are looked to in every organization to provide strategic planning for their teams, a leader with high levels of consequential thinking is best positioned to put the team on track and move toward its mission.

4. Navigate Emotions – One of the misconceptions of involving emotions in driving human behavior is that if we are in an "emotional place," we will make a bad decision. While the emotional decision being a poor one can sometimes be true, from an emotional intelligence standpoint, having the ability to harness the emotions is a higher form of self- mastery. The emotions have the power to energize us toward accomplishing what we want. Understanding that they are a source of valuable insight, competent leaders can transform them into feelings that are helpful to themselves and to others.

5. Intrinsic Motivation – Intrinsic motivation is how we gain energy from personal values and commitments versus being driven by external forces. Extrinsically motivated individuals, by contrast, depend on what others say or behave toward them and rely on a reward system to gain their sense of worth. Extrinsically motivated leaders are on a track to reduce their self-efficacy. Intrinsically motivated leaders are more able to stand up, challenge the status quo, take risks, and persevere during challenging times.

6. Optimism – By taking a proactive perspective of hope and possibility, we are exercising optimism. Individuals draw from both pools of optimistic and pessimistic points of view every day of the week. On one end of the spectrum, we can blame others, uses victim thinking, and see ourselves as powerless. Sometimes this is thought of by the person afflicted with a pessimistic view of being "practical" or pragmatic and over analyze risks. On the other end of the spectrum, we take responsibility for finding our solutions and persevere through obstacles.

7. Develop Empathy – Our capacity to recognize and respond appropriately to others' emotions is a good place to start the competency of developing empathy. It's a nonjudgmental openness to what others are feeling, as well as their experiences. By validating and responding in a way that shows you are concerned, you build trust that supports your ability to lead.

8. Pursue Noble Goal – Leaders that consistently connect their daily choices to their overarching sense of purpose create a foundation for leadership that is not easily shaken. This competency activates all other competencies in this list.

A noble goal is something that we connect our meaning to in our work role, as well as our time spent away from work. At one extreme, a leader with low levels of this competency lives for the short term and is constantly putting out fires. They may be easily swayed by others and by short term avoidance of avoiding discomfort. A strong dose of this results in making great decisions and transforming feelings on a deep level.

Although it may seem like some professionals are simply gifted with these skills, the truth is that most leadership traits can be learned and sharpened with time and practice. To become an effective leader, you must acquire and hone your skills quite frequently. You may even notice that the best leaders at your place of business are often those that are continuously educating themselves by reading books, attending seminars, and enrolling into professional development courses consistently throughout their career.

LEVERAGE THE COACHING MODEL

A February 2018 survey conducted by Development Dimensions International, Inc. to nearly 1000 leaders revealed many key insights for developing a leadership program. We'll focus on two of them since they align with our eight competencies.

1. Organizations that made the leadership development program accessible only to senior leaders were outperformed by a factor of over 4X. The cost for implementing a leadership development program can get expensive, with training costs and time allotted to development (the study cites $4,000 per person and 39 hours per year). In overlooking the developing high potentials for any reason, however, organizations are much more likely to fail with a program and or go backwards.

2. The focus of an organization should be on the time, not dollars, spent. Additionally, having ready-access to a coach and/or a mentor is a major contributing factor in successfully developing future leaders. A coaching culture, or one where everyone can serve as a coach to someone within the company, is a great concept, but respondents reported their appetite for coaching to be waning, probably since most existing managers are not very good at it.

Not surprising then, was that the highest valued method among leaders for learning was having an external coach or mentor. This creates challenges and opportunities for talent development professionals. Simple but accountable models are available, along with qualified coaching on how to be a coach is needed to ensure the coach is delivering value for the time spent.

IMPLEMENTING YOUR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Successful employee training and development programs of any kind go beyond the standard new hire orientation. They aren't sporadic courses that employees occasionally take as needed, either. Instead, it's taking a strategic, organized, systematic approach to training that aligns individual growth with business goals.

1 IDENTIFY A
SKILLS GAPS

To implement a successful training and development program, identify organizational and employee training needs. What are the pain points? What's lacking? What can be improved? What's the business impact? The best training programs address current processes and issues, and it also anticipates future company needs. Your employees are your best source of information when it comes to identifying training and performance gaps. They have first-hand knowledge of the work, processes, procedures and issues involved and can provide valuable feedback and ideas you hadn't considered. Seek input from your team before documenting training goals.

2 MAKE LEARNING PART OF
THE COMPANY CULTURE

Leadership and development programs go further than offering a few classes; you should weave it into your company culture. Involve every level in the organization—from coordinators to upper management. Document training opportunities in the employee handbook, make it a company value, and encourage employees to speak up when they find new educational opportunities.

3 ALLOW YOUR LEADERS TO WORK ON THEIR COMPETENCIES

Developing new neural pathways to develop the competencies takes time, commitment, and follow up. Giving your leaders a chance to work on their newly learned competencies and even better leveraging the strengths they learned/discovered to intentionally lead initiatives is where the biggest gains can be made.

4 FOLLOW-THROUGH ON ACTION ITEMS

The success of your training program hinges on the debrief. After every training session, make sure employees take time to process what they've learned. What are the takeaways? What questions do they have? What are the action items they're going to implement as a result? This step ensures employees follow through and apply what they've learned.

An accountability checks-and-balances system is also recommended, one that utilizes a combination of incentives, as well as consequences for not meeting regularly with your mentor/coach. A supervisor's sign off that a participant will, in fact, be scheduling time and making that a top priority is a great mandate to come from the C-level executives.

The "playbook" nature of the competencies, complete with reflective question, sets for the leader to reflect on gives the best guidance to participants to continue their development regardless of access to their coach/mentor.

5 MEASURE THE RESULTS

Implementing a leadership development program without some metrics to measure success is a sure-fire way to hamper your organizations' efforts to bring about a fruitful initiative. The best way to demonstrate the value of an employee training and development program is to show training ROI. Once you've determined the goals and training method, take measurements before and after training sessions. Did the course improve efficiency? Reduce the need to hire new employees? Determining training ROI demonstrates the value and business impact of training.

The leadership training programs offered by New Horizons, and yours truly, administers an Emotional Intelligence assessment that measures the professionals current level of proficiency across all eight competencies that we discussed earlier. It looks at the leader's ability to:

Make Decisions & Be Influential

Build & Enhance Relationships

Sustain a High Quality of Life

Maintain Balance Between Work and Personal Life

A potent combination of the five elements mentioned above, combined with formal training opportunities for your high potentials, as well as mid and senior level managers, is a good structure to begin your formal drafting and implementing of the leadership development program.

What to include or not will also require taking a strategic look into the unique goals of your organization. Other aspects of a successful program may include:

Microlearning

Coaching from Peers

Game Based Learning

Coaching from Employees

NEXT STEPS

Clearly, effective leadership is a major concern for organizations. It bears repeating that in the 2016 Deloitte Human Capital Trends Report, 89% of executives rated the need to strengthen, re-engineer, and improve organizational leadership as a top priority, while more than half said their organization wasn't ready to meet current leadership needs.

Training helps grow employees from within and develop strong future leaders who are invested in the company. It nurtures succession pipelines so that companies can cultivate and promote exceptional talent from within the organization.

Learning & Performance Institute

In 2017, following a rigorous assessment by the Learning & Performance Institute (LPI), the entire Leadership and Professional Development program offering by New Horizons was endorsed for the highest standards of excellence, commercial relevance, and positive learner experience.

Still, the complexity involved in rolling out a leadership training program can prevent managers from pursuing learning opportunities for their teams. As the world's largest independent IT training company, New Horizons offers custom training programs to fit every business need. Whether you're looking to add a few classes to your current training repertoire or build a training program from scratch, we can help you find the right courses and training methods to achieve your organizational goals and start building your leadership pipeline.

Whether you're looking to develop entry-level employees, experienced managers, or directors, leadership development courses from New Horizons will help strengthen your overall business by continuously upgrading and optimizing your teams' skills around several key areas, including communication, emotional intelligence, business acumen, and more. In addition, our entire lineup of Leadership & Professional Development courses includes free post-class content, such as eBooks, quick videos, personal & team assessments, as well as tools & templates—all designed to help students continue their journey to ongoing success.

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