

# HOW TO GROW LEADERS: THE SEVEN KEY PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

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John Adair transformed the understanding of how leadership work with the pioneering book *Not Bosses But Leaders*. *How to grow leaders: The seven key principles of effective leadership* explore in an authoritative way what we know about leadership and leadership development. There is a revolution underway. We are moving fast in some areas and slower in others - from management to business leadership. As the market for good leaders, increases, programs for leadership development are in demand. Many of these are old management development programmes renamed, and others are full of confusing theories and unproductive approaches. This book aims to set the record straight, focusing the body of knowledge on leadership, identifying the seven key principles of leadership development, and answering key questions on how to select, train and educate leaders at the level of team, operational and strategic leadership. A vital addition to the debate on leadership from a true expert, this book also considers the global challenge and long term issues involved.

From strategy and selection to training and culture, organisations that take a holistic approach to growing leaders will be the most successful. John Adair believes leadership exists on three broad levels; strategic, operational and team; this nomenclature is now beginning to catch on. Furthering the point is a common fallacy that all an organization needs is a strategic leader at the helm. The secret of business success is excellence of leadership at all three levels.

The seven principles are a simple framework for you to apply in your context. Each one is easy to state and associated with your common sense. Emphatically speaking, the seven are complementary; you should expect some added synergy if you apply them as a whole.

## PRINCIPLE ONE: DEVELOP A STRATEGY FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

As stated earlier, leadership exists on different levels. At the team level, the leader is in charge of 10 to 15 people. At the operational level, the leader is responsible for a significant part of the business, such as a business unit, division or key functional department. Invariably operational leaders have more than one team leader reporting to them.

At strategic level, the leader – often the CEO – is leading the whole organisation. Strategic leadership – a phrase that the author coined in 1970 – is actually made up of two Greek words: *stratos*, a large body of people, and the *-egy* ending which means leadership. Therefore, strategy is the art of leading a large body of people.

The key to achieving sustainable business success is to have excellence in leadership at all three levels, and these leaders need to work harmoniously together as the organisation's leadership team.

The most common and expensive error that organisations

commit is to focus on leadership development of their more senior managers, so that becomes their entire “strategy”. In doing so, they completely ignore their team leaders. Yet it is the team leader who is closest to the customer in connection with the same, the book reiterates that strategy embraces all three levels.

There is a useful distinction to be made between strategic thinking and strategic planning. You should see your leadership development strategy – evolved and guided by a small steering group – as part of your overall business strategy. It should be longer term (five to ten years). Don’t let the ‘urgent’ deflect you from the important. Lastly, a strategy should have more than one element to it.

### PRINCIPLE TWO: SELECTION

In the fifties, if someone was “a born leader” nobody thought that the person in question could do anything about it. As a saying of the day had it, “leaders are born and not made”.

We don’t think the same now. In the sixties, a breakthrough made at Sandhurst which proved that leaders can be trained and developed. The other half of the truth, however, is that people do vary in their relative amount of leadership potential. Since it is not easy to develop leaders, why not hire people who are halfway – or more – there already? Instead at least make sure that when you recruit from outside or promote from inside, you know how to select those with a high potential for growing business leaders, for it is leaders that will grow your business rather than just administering it.

Furthermore, there are no psychological questionnaires specifically for assessing leadership that have stood the test of time, but there are some proven group methods that are worth having in your repertoire when selecting team leaders. For instance, most organisations can improve their powers of detecting leadership at more senior levels simply by becoming crystal-clear about the differences between being a leader and a manager and most would benefit by updating their interviewing and assessment techniques.

As the author believes, a person may be appointed a manager at any level, but he or she is not a leader until

the appointment has been ratified in the hearts and minds of those who work with them. If few managers in the organisation are receiving that kind of accolade, it means someone failed to apply the principle two when they appointed the person.

### PRINCIPLE THREE: TRAINING FOR LEADERSHIP

To train implies instruction with a specific end in view; to educate implies attempting to bring out latent capabilities. In reality, there is no hard-and-fast line between training and education. Both can be considered as training.

As part of strategic thinking, you should identify your business training needs in the leadership context and prioritise them. Keep in mind, training is going to cost your organisation time and money. You need courses or programmes which produce good leadership. The author advises that training should be sequential, which means that the first level to look at is your team leaders, alias first-line managers. No leadership role should be given without some form of training - as it is morally wrong.

If you outsource your in-company leadership training education to providers, make sure that you retain “ownership” and overall control, so that the programmes fit in with your strategy and organisational ethos. Delegation never means abdication.

### PRINCIPLE FOUR: CAREER DEVELOPMENT.

People grow as leaders by the actual practice of leading. There is no substitute for experience. What organisations can do is to give people opportunities to lead. The trick here is to give a person the right job at the right time. It should be the kind of leadership role that is realistic as well as challenging for the individual concerned. No stretch, no growth.

If your organisation is serious about applying this principle, it should, for example, have a conversation once a year with each leader or would-be leader in which it should outline two or three options it has in store to offer the individual greater career progression. Equally, the individual should say what they aspire to do. They may, for example, want to move out of a specialist role to a more generalist (leadership) one.

Fitting together this jigsaw of hopes and expectations is the name of the game, which should be a win-win one. A strategic leader in the making – possibly as your successor – will need experience in more than one functional area of the business; if you are an international company in more than one country.

## PRINCIPLE FIVE: LINE MANAGERS AS LEADERSHIP DEVELOPERS

In the midst of the Battle of El Alamein in 1942, Montgomery found time to telephone General Horrocks, one of his top operational leaders and a newly-appointed corps commander, and gave him a tutorial on leading at that level. The reason being Monty had observed that Horrocks had been reverting back to being a divisional general. All good leaders are also teachers. Developing the individual entails one-to-one meetings at regular intervals to offer constructive criticism as well as encouragement or support.

Above team level (and some would say even at team level) all leaders are “leaders of leaders. Good leaders will use their one-to-one opportunities – formal or informal – to share their knowledge of leadership in a conversational but effective way. It is, if you like, the apprentice approach to learning leadership, and its necessary condition is mutual respect. It is that mutual trust or respect that makes us both eager to learn and ready to teach. You need a system of setting objectives and appraising performance – part of action-centred leadership – but it will not be complete unless it is seen as a channel for two-way learning.

## PRINCIPLE SIX: CULTURE

Armed forces do grow leaders. They select and train men for leadership. They have placed a high value on leadership since the 18th century. They have a culture where leadership is valued at all levels. The motto of Sandhurst expresses the ideal that is expected from every officer: Serve to Lead.

Values are the stars your organisation steers by and together they define your distinctive ethos. Make sure your culture comes to place a high value on “good leadership and leadership for good”. In the final

analysis, it is culture that grows leaders, so it is vital to review it and make changes where necessary.

Corporate culture should also encourage a climate of self-development in leadership. Organisations only have 50 percent of the cards in their hands, the other 50 percent are in the hands of the individual. There may be no leadership courses available to you, but you can still learn leadership. Books are the best method, together with reflection on your own experience.

## PRINCIPLE SEVEN: THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

In *Effective Strategic Leadership* (2003), the author identified for the first time the seven generic functions of a strategic leader. One of them is: to select and develop leaders for today and tomorrow. In other words, as CEO, you own the problem of growing leaders. Personnel or training specialists are there to advise and help. They can assist you to formulate and implement your strategy, but you are in the driving seat. If not, don't expect any forward movement.

Apart from taking responsibility for the strategy, you should also be leading from the front. You should be known to talk about leadership on occasions – not often but sometimes and always effectively. You should visit any internal leadership courses and show your support for them. If you care about leadership, so will the organisation. Incidentally, it is also a chance to get your message across, as well as an opportunity to practise the skill of listening. Organisations today need listening leaders.

In summary, developing future leaders is not a mystery. We know the laws of aerodynamics that undergird successful and sustained leadership development. The seven principles identified are the foundations you are looking for.

Why do it? The answer is simple. You have great people working in your organisation. Do they not need great leaders? For, as John Buchan once said: “The task of leadership is not to put greatness into people but to elicit it, for the greatness is there already.”