Leadership:

A Resource In Demand
But Often Limited In Supply

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Leadership

While few would question the importance of leadership in any organization, it is often in short supply — despite the evident benefits. There are those who believe leadership is a trait you are born with, but many others who have studied leadership believe it to be a skill. You may have certain inherent attributes that make it easier to learn and master leadership, but it is still a skill that can be developed by anyone who is willing to put forth the necessary time and effort.

The question that occupies my thoughts is "What is the reason such a precious resource is in short supply?" Leaders are necessary to the health of any organization, and the future of that organization is ultimately dependent on attracting, retaining and developing leaders.

It occurred to me that a potential reason is that despite the talk about its importance, many organizations fail to take the necessary steps to develop a culture of leadership. It is not an accidental phenomenon. It must be a conscious decision to develop this type of culture and requires giving the resources necessary to truly identify and foster the development of leaders. I believe it is important for any company to develop a culture where future leaders can learn necessary skills. In reading about leadership, I have found John Maxwell offers a great insight about "proximity." Leadership is taught and learned when someone has access to a good leader and is able to observe leadership in action. Leadership is not simply a theory, it is an art. Among the best ways to learn about leadership is to have a trusting relationship with a leader where your proximity to them allows you to observe, discuss and truly understand the skills in action.

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A key responsibility of leadership should always be the development of other leaders. Other leaders and I are currently developing a culture of leadership within our own company. Here are a few of the initial steps to consider to develop your own program:

STEP 1: Make a public commitment

Announce to your entire team that leadership is important and that it will be developed as a strategic priority. Share your culture of leadership philosophy.

STEP 2; Identify your current and potential leaders.

Talk to them about helping your desire to develop more and better leaders in the organization. Gain their commitment that they want to either become a recognized leader or better leader through active participation.

STEP 3: Bring current and future leaders together.

Start a leadership roundtable where leaders can regularly meet and be accountable for specific aspects of the business. Foster a learning environment based on mutual trust. Delegation has the added benefit of providing current leaders more time to mentor and focus on other aspects of their role as some tasks have been assigned to a future leader to manage

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STEP 4: Set expectations for participation.

Even if someone is not directly managing others, it does not mean they cannot be a leader. We are all called to first lead ourselves. How can each person model the leadership way and become an example to others? Make sure they understand how this will help them develop both personally and professionally so that they can grow.

STEP 5: Give others the opportunity to lead.

Future leaders need real-world practice and experience to develop leadership skills. We rotate who leads each of our monthly meetings, so everyone has the chance to develop the agenda, lead the discussion and learn what it means to share the responsibility of leading.

STEP 6: Learn together.

Consider reading a book together and then spending some time each discussing what was learned. Encourage leaders to share their experiences about what is working and what needs further development. The discussion will provide tremendous insights and may even give you, as the primary leader, a new perspective about your team.

There are many other strategies you can use to begin developing a culture of leadership in your organization today. I encourage you to research the many fine books available from such renowned authors as John Maxwell, Jim Collins, Simon Sinek, and Patrick Lencioni to name just a few. An organization's ability to grow and prosper is limited by the number of good leaders it has engaged. The most important thing to succeeding at developing leaders is to get started.

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