

Leadership Development is Key for Middle Managers

Middle managers suffer from the middle child syndrome. They are responsible for directing employees in key performance areas and their success is required for obtaining important business results. However, they often are neglected within companies, getting neither the respect nor the attention they deserve. PSP believes that developing middle managers can return the investment many times over.

Middle Managers Play a Pivotal Role

What makes middle managers important is their position within the company. They are close to the action, with knowledge of operations and processes as well as first-hand relationships with customers and front-line employees. They are networked throughout the organization and know the important issues, where problems exist, and where opportunities lie. They are ultimately the leaders who will make change happen—or throw roadblocks in its way when they are not involved. Neglecting



this group is detrimental to the company because middle management is both the proving ground and the development ground for future executives. The cost can be high; when a key middle manager leaves, a storehouse of knowledge leaves as well.

Creating a Developmental Culture

Leadership development programs targeted to this key middle management group help align their leadership behaviors with existing business strategy and goals. As with any change initiative, it is important to obtain buy-in from middle managers for any developmental process. Sharing business transition goals with them and gaining their input on what leaders in the company need to do differently in the future can provide

important information and valuable insights. It can also help identify success factors for a leadership competency model that can serve as the basis for achieving business goals.

Once a competency model is developed, managers can be measured against the success factors. PSP's customers use standardized management assessments for external benchmarking and 360° evaluations for internal performance feedback. The results from these assessments are then integrated, in a developmental interview, with a review of individual managers' own perceptions and specific business challenges.

Individualize Developmental Planning

From these interviews, individual training and developmental programs are created to target each manager's specific needs. This process helps obtain the middle manager's commitment to specific training and development goals because they have already identified key competencies necessary for achieving the business plan. The suggested program not only helps them be more effective on the job in achieving business results, but also helps in achieving personal career objectives.

When this developmental process is done for a middle management group as a whole, important group data can be assessed to identify skill or competency gaps. These can be targeted through group training sessions.

The emphasis is always on individual accountability of managers for their own development if they are to progress as future leaders. Companies give them the tools to work with, but it is up to them to "take it and run with it." Often, this developmental process will separate those who are fully committed to achieving success and those who are not. It is a way to identify future executive leaders.

Executive Follow-up and Coaching

Senior executives need to reinforce developmental action plans for middle managers with follow-up discussions and coaching. They should give particular attention to on-the-job experiences that might be helpful in developing individual skills and competencies. These projects need not be large. Smaller but more meaningful projects can provide valuable training experience while also contributing to a company's business results.

By targeting middle managers for development, executives are sending a clear message about their importance to the organization. At the same time, middle managers are impacting everyday company performance, creating the next generation of executive leaders, and aligning all parts of the company for achieving business success.