

LMI Journal



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Take the Path to Organizational Success

By Paul J. Meyer

On a trip to a specific destination, a driver can look for certain landmarks to be sure of taking the correct road. A team also has “landmarks” to evaluate whether or not it is on the path to excellence. Several components determine the success of a winning team. These elements include decision making, creative problem solving, collaboration, and facilitative leadership.

Decision making

1. Standards for making decisions. Decisions are always made with reference to certain standards or values. The organizational counterpart to a leader’s strong self-image is a well-defined organizational plan of action that serves as a blueprint for decisions. Identification of priorities among the various organizational goals provides an index to their relative importance to the organization.

2. Responsibility. Determining who will make a particular decision is another important consideration. Even the most effective leaders must repeatedly judge whether to make a decision themselves, refer it to someone else, or delegate it. As a general rule, decisions should be made at the lowest organizational level consistent with quality. Appropriate delegation of decision making to team members strengthens them, enhances the quality of decisions, prevents morale problems, and maximizes your time effectiveness.

3. Personal accountability. Although you delegate authority and assign responsibility for a decision, you are still

personally accountable to the organization for the outcome. Good judgment in the type of decisions you delegate makes it unlikely that such action will be necessary very often. In the event that you are ever forced to reverse or modify a decision, be sure to explain fully to everyone involved. Do all you can to help team members make wise decisions. The more competent they become in making decisions, the bigger contribution they make to the achievement of organizational goals.

Creative problem solving

Like decision making, problem solving may involve a relatively insignificant item, or it may concern a serious issue with the possibility of a major impact on the entire organization. The larger and more important the problem, the more time and detail that go into each step of the problem-solving process. For minor problems, several of the steps may be accomplished mentally in only a few seconds. But the process always includes these steps:

1. Crystallize the goal. Many problems are caused simply because the goal is not clearly understood by all team members. Take time to review the purpose of the team and its primary goals.

2. Define the problem. It is vitally important to discover the nature of the real problem when something is obviously wrong. Sometimes the visible element is merely a symptom. Define the problem clearly in terms of one or more



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organizational or personal goals.

3. List criteria for selecting a solution. Establish guidelines for evaluating possible solutions and making decisions by referring to specific organizational goals and priorities. This involves determining the rules by which the most workable solution will be selected and the standards the solution must meet. The criteria might include impact on product quality, cost limits, personnel changes, the leader's time allotment, or a target date for choosing a solution to be implemented.

4. Collect information. Asking open-ended questions and listening carefully to the answers are generally the best ways to gather information. Ask others how they would solve the problem and why they would take that approach. Attempt to see the problem or tentative solution through the eyes of others.

5. Develop possible solutions. Examine all of the data collected and record all possible solutions suggested by the data. List as many possible solutions as you or the group can generate by brainstorming.

6. Analyze possible solutions. Allow time for ideas to "incubate." Work on other problems and come back to the original one with new ideas. In one instance, think primarily in terms of profit. Another time, think in terms of team member development or other objectives. Analyze all assumptions to be sure you are not accepting artificial limitations. When you accept traditional assumptions about what can be done, you limit the ability to find creative solutions. Alter assumptions about what can be accomplished and you open your mind to new possibilities for solving specific problems and for meaningful personal development.

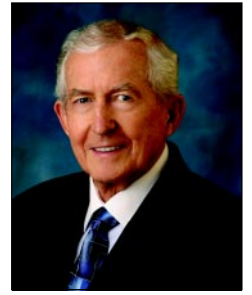
7. Make the decision. When as much information as possible has been gathered and considered, assume the responsibility for making a decision, or for leading team members to choose the best possible solution.

8. Implement the solution and follow up. Since the process is problem solving rather than just decision making, a plan for implementation must be developed to carry the job through to completion. Assign responsibility for each action step. Set up a schedule and follow it to make sure the problem is being solved. Make appropriate adjustments along the way to ensure successful problem solving.

Collaboration

Many teams who were perceived as underdogs have won championships because they focused on the team goal rather than their own individual goals. The key to collaboration is the ability of team members to work interdependently. Of course, all team members are different from one another. In fact, some teams are purposely designed to maximize the differences among team members. These differences can

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– Paul J. Meyer

often lead to friction, tension, and conflict. Conflicts are forks in the road to high performance. How conflicts are handled will determine whether a team stagnates or moves to an even higher level of results. When conflict happens, use the following steps to help team members overcome the conflict:

- Identify the real conflict and the specific team members involved.
- Communicate with each other. This means each team member has a chance to talk about his or her thoughts and feelings and is also willing to listen to other team members.
- Handle the conflict head on and out in the open. This means each team member must be willing to deal with and discuss difficult issues.
- Get team members thinking about potential solutions. Don't judge ideas at this point, just get as many ideas out on the table as possible.
- To resolve most conflicts, get team members to make at least a small compromise on the various issues. Negotiate a solution that is acceptable to everyone.
- Make a commitment. Each team member must commit to the negotiated compromise solution. This means they will give 100 percent effort to make the solution work.
- Follow up to be sure all team members are fully cooperating and putting forth their best effort to make the solution succeed.

Facilitative leadership

Today, the team leader is really the caretaker of the team. This means the leader is responsible for helping, supporting, and facilitating the process of team building, teamwork, and team performance. A facilitative leader understands that the solutions to problems, the information to make decisions, and the creativity to innovate is to be found in team members. Facilitative leaders see their role as bringing out the best talents and abilities of each team member and blending the different strengths of each person into a harmonious whole. The goal is not to make everyone perform the same, but rather to use each person's unique abilities to achieve the best possible performance. The best team leaders develop team members to perform at a high level even without the leader guiding them.

Recruiting and Keeping Winners

People are looking for something to believe in. This has been true for the entire history of mankind. No one simply wants a “job” for eight hours a day. People want to be involved in something that has meaning, something that has value—something that makes a difference.

As a leader, be alert to this need that is present in everyone. You can be the person that team members believe in and trust when you demonstrate interest in their personal and professional growth. You can only do this by being a role model. You must “talk the talk and walk the walk.”

You must be a true leader. Tell your team members that they have what it takes to be successful in your company. Show them how you will support and train them. Get to know them. Know their family. Know their interests. Know their goals.

These principles apply to everyone. Use them to recruit team members who will help you reach your business goals.

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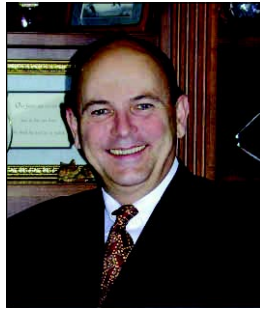
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The Three Phases of Effective Growth



David Byrd
President, LMI

From my current perspective, which has developed from a background of athletic coaching at the high school/college level and over the past 30 years of executive leadership development, I have observed that **there are three distinct phases** of growth through which every one must pass in order to grow as an effective leader.

Phase One: “Making effective choices”

We all possess the freedom to choose. That freedom, however, works like a double edge sword; it can cut both ways. We all enjoy the benefits or suffer the consequences of our choices. There are thousands of choices to be made every day, but there are three specific choices that will determine the quality of your professional growth.

- The **choice of a positive attitude**: I have never observed the development of effective growth stimulated from a negative attitude.
- The **choice of effective actions**: It is not how much you do but the effectiveness of what you do that counts.
- The **choice of accountability**: We all struggle with self-imposed limitations. Accountability pushes you past those limits.

Phase Two: “Building Confidence”

Confidence is developed from the experience of successful attempts. If you are starting something new or desire to get to the next level and have had zero successful attempts, your natural human reaction is to quit or blame something or someone else. What do you do? Find a proven system and stick with it until you begin to experience successful attempts. It is like riding a bicycle; once you develop confidence you should never lose it, as long as your self-image remains intact.

Phase Three: “Driven by Vision”

Use your gift of imagination to build a passionate vision of your future. This passionate vision will drive your daily actions and sustain your passion. I have observed that people will quit just short of their intended goal if their minds are not fixed on a passionate vision. Vision put the compelling why behind what you do.

These three phases of effective growth are interchangeable, and you may find yourself at any phase during your development process. I find it important to be aware of which phase you are in at any given time.

If you would like to read more about effective growth, ask your local LMI Partner to provide you with my latest book “The Tripping Point in Leadership”, or call customer service at 1-800-568-1241 and buy a copy.

With Positive Expectancy,

David Byrd
President, Leadership Management Institute™

Recognize the Power of Persuasion

As a leader, a primary responsibility is to gain your team's commitment and support to the organization's vision and goals. Getting total agreement from each team member on how to reach those goals is not always possible. But if a team is to work together, there must be some consensus on how to proceed. The first step is to get team members to put aside their personal preferences and agree to the specific goals they want to achieve, as well as agree on the methods to achieve them.

You, as the leader, are responsible for bringing about such a consensus. The tool for accomplishing this purpose is the power of persuasion. Accepting the role of leader ethically binds you to use authority, influence, and logic in leading others to act in the best interests of the organization. Persuasion is clearly the preferred choice of the effective leader. **Consider these techniques for becoming more persuasive:**

- ◆ **Build a solid reputation.** Establish a reputation for honesty and integrity. The ancient philosopher Aristotle recognized the importance of character when he said, "Character is the most effective agent of persuasion." Character is best observed in attitudes and actions. Character is demonstrated by doing what you say you will do. Character is the Golden Rule of persuasion. Strengthen your character, and you strengthen your power to persuade.
- ◆ **Create a climate of mutual trust.** In addition to establishing a reputation for honesty and integrity, do all you can to create a climate of mutual trust. Be a team player, be patient, be fair, be objective, be tolerant, be forgiving. Distrust in an organization creates game playing, blaming, "politics," and other destructive behaviors. But when everybody in the organization knows they can trust what you say and what you do, they tend to model their behavior after yours, and they are more likely to follow your leadership.
- ◆ **Listen attentively.** Most people will only open their minds to your ideas after they feel you have listened to them and acknowledged their opinions. When associates feel understood, they are much more willing to

consider your ideas. Careful listening is often more persuasive than polished speaking. In addition, you gain many good ideas that may not have occurred to you. Be willing to compromise and incorporate some of the ideas of others as long as your objectives can still be met. Achieving the goal is your purpose — not imposing all of your ideas about how to achieve it.

- ◆ **Prepare to persuade.** Have all the facts and issues clearly in mind before attempting to persuade. Anticipate possible objections and prepare for them. Be supportive if defensiveness or hostility surfaces in the reactions of team members. Be sure that you are right most of the time. If you customarily speak before you are fully informed, people soon begin to react defensively to everything you say. Prepare your case and present it with brevity and clarity.

- ◆ **Demonstrate positive attitudes.** Plan every action with the intent to

produce the best possible results for the organization, for your peers, and for team members. For persuasion to be effective, it must be beneficial for all. When you adopt a positive attitude toward your own responsibility as a leader, every action you take benefits the organization and creates goodwill with your coworkers.

The ability to persuade works best when you sincerely care about your team members. True concern ensures that your persuasive powers are directed toward mutual benefits for both individual employees and the organization.



Communicate Authentically to Others

People are the wellspring of productivity; dealing with associates through integrity and authenticity is imperative from both a human and a business standpoint. Successful leadership depends on communicating your organization's vision to team members and gaining their support and commitment to that vision. The best way to accomplish that goal is through clear, effective, and authentic communication. Begin today to become an authentic communicator!

Using Innovation to Succeed

Because we live in a world of constant change, organizations must continually change to meet the demands of the competitive marketplace. There seems to be no end to the stories of companies that failed to change, and eventually went out of business. In today's business environment continuous invention and innovation are no longer luxuries; they have become the vital key to survival and prosperity. Innovation is one of the few areas where organizations can achieve a significant competitive advantage.

There are many factors that determine an organization's success at innovation. The goal of innovation is to constantly create new and better products and services that meet or create a need in the marketplace. Innovation is proactive change. Innovation means to think like an entrepreneur – always looking for new opportunities. It is no longer enough to have the best product or service today; you must also consistently innovate for tomorrow.

Unfortunately, this is easier said than done. The larger and more successful an organization becomes, the more difficult it is to change and reinvent its products and services. In fact, the more successful an organization becomes at execution, the harder it becomes to innovate and change.

Leaders must learn to challenge today's success in order to create tomorrow's opportunities. Creativity and innovation must become everyone's responsibility. Most new ideas and innovations are created from the interaction between team members and customers. Customers want solutions to their problems, they want their desires to be met, and their needs fulfilled. These are all potential innovations. Leaders must have every team member actively searching for these opportunities or they will pass right by the organization.

Establishing and maintaining an innovative climate in the workplace requires sensitivity to individual differences when structuring work assignments. Because individual's needs differ, how you lead people must differ. At the same time, the necessary procedures of your business must be met, and the difference in the way you lead particular individuals must avoid any appearance of preferential treatment. **Give careful consideration to these factors:**

▲ **Structure and freedom.** Some team members possess

highly structured thinking patterns and want to work "by the book." They want an explicit procedure to follow in every situation because this helps them feel secure. Give them training that enables them to do their jobs accurately and promptly, but do not burden them with the responsibility for making decisions in unpredictable situations. Other team members, in contrast, prefer to devise their own work plan. They want to feel that you consider their judgment dependable, and that they are free to exercise initiative. Generally, the more freedom people have the more creative and innovative they become. Their productivity and motivation are directly related to the degree of freedom and responsibility you grant them. Be sensitive to individual needs and assign responsibilities accordingly. Keep the goals of your organization firmly in sight, but give people as much freedom as they prove capable of handling. At the same time, require accountability. This approach empowers team members to increase their overall productivity and generate the greatest number of innovative ideas.



▲ **Conformity and creativity.** Encouraging team members to use as much of their creativity as possible – as long as their creativity is focused on productivity – is to your advantage. From their creativity come ideas for improving present products, services, and for implementing future projects. As a leader, your responsibility in encouraging creativity requires careful balance between inviting and directing creativity toward appropriate targets, while ensuring conformity in situations where no deviation can be tolerated. For example, the ethical policies of the organization are so vital to its existence that conformity must be maintained with no "creative" deviations allowed. Safety and quality control regulations must be the letter of the law. But experimentations and fresh ideas in many other areas are essential for continued profitability and competitiveness.

The higher your expectations, the more creativity team members exhibit. High, yet realistic, expectations also increase the dignity and self-worth of those individuals who then find fulfillment in perceiving themselves as dynamic, creative contributors to the team. As the self-worth of team members grows, their motivation and ability to meet challenges improves.

Dealing with the Demands of Leadership

Tomorrow's business environment will be characterized by more complex problems, even faster rates of change, increased global competition, and the commoditization of most products. It will become more and more difficult for organizations to develop and maintain a unique advantage over competitors. What worked in the industrial age, or in the technology, information, and communications age will no longer be sufficient.

The motivational leader of the future will have to develop in these areas:

- *Leadership is a relationship.* Leadership is about people. You don't lead things, you lead people. You lead people through the relationship you have with them. Only when you are able to build positive, trusting relationships with team members will you be able to effectively lead them. You can only develop trusting relationships by spending time with people, interacting, dialoguing, and sharing experiences. When you have relationships based on trust and experience, you know you can depend on each other no matter what the future holds.
- *Lead through goals and values.* As organizations move from commanding and controlling employees to empowering them, it becomes even more important to have clear goals and values that are understood by everyone. It is no longer feasible to count on the leader for all the answers. We must trust team members to act on their own, to make their own day-to-day decisions. It is now impractical to try to manage and control everything people do. How, then, do you guide and influence the behavior of team members? The answer is to have crystal clear goals and values that are shared throughout the organization. If everyone is pursuing the same goals and acting consistent with the same values, it is not necessary to control what they do. When team members know the goals and are committed to the organization's values, they will almost always act in ways supportive to the organization. The key will be the leader's ability to crystallize the organization's goals and values and effectively communicate them to team members.
- *Balance your work.* It is possible for a leader to do too much – or not enough. The failure to delegate traps executives under the pressure of too much paperwork, too many details to handle, and too little time for creative



planning and leading. Attitude is the key to avoiding this trap. Believe in people, train and develop them continuously, and give them the opportunity to accept responsibility for significant achievement. Just as devastating as the failure to delegate is overdoing delegation. Giving too much of your own authority and responsibility to others who are not adequately trained, who do not share your goals, or who are overworked means that you will soon be out of touch with the operation and will lose the

insight you need to influence the direction the organization is moving. Avoid this trap by maintaining a written delegation plan that details what you plan to delegate and to whom, with a schedule for implementing your plan.

- *Focus on strengths.* It is easy to drift along allowing people to do the same work they have always done and assuming that is all they can do. People are the greatest under-utilized asset in business today. Study people; learn their strengths, their personal goals, and their desires. Then give them opportunities to develop new abilities and learn new skills that will make them more valuable as team members and more fulfilled as individuals. When people grow, the whole organization benefits. Everyone has both strengths and weaknesses. It is the leader's responsibility to put team members in the right role to best utilize their unique talents and abilities.
- *Multiply your leadership.* If you want to move up in the organization, the quickest way to make that possible is to develop someone else to do your job. Then you are available for new assignments and increased responsibilities. If you are already at the top, developing someone to take over is even more important. If no one is ready to succeed you, the organization may well die when you are no longer there to lead it. That would be a tragedy for those who have invested a large part of their lives in it. The ultimate measurement of a leader's success is how many other leaders they have developed. Organizations succeed in direct proportion to the number of leaders they have. With only one or a few top leaders, organizations must resort to a hierarchical bureaucratic structure to manage and control the actions of employees. This structure is destined to fail in a fast-paced, ever-changing business world. The ideal goal is to develop everyone into a leader.

Assume Responsibility; Be Accountable

Responsibility for solving a problem or reaching a goal is frequently delegated to a team. Delegation means that team members are given responsibility and authority to carry out certain tasks while at the same time having their work inspected by the one who delegated it. As a team member, consider having your work reviewed and evaluated as practical training, an important aspect of the entire teamwork process. Having your work evaluated and receiving the opportunity to make improvements is your chance to learn, make advancement, and ultimately to be even more successful.

Unfortunately, learning to delegate successfully is a skill many leaders have not fully learned. Many supervisors, managers, or bosses simply do not know how to delegate effectively. They tend to either “micromanage” or totally abandon you. As a team member you need to assume responsibility for learning what is expected of you and what your specific responsibility is on the team. Communicate with the team leaders and other team members:

- Ask questions.
- Send e-mails.
- Make phone calls.

Ask for facts and information that is relevant to the task. In addition, offer opinions to others and give candid feedback on their suggestions.

Do what is required to understand how best to carry out your responsibilities on the team. As a team member, learning how to carry out the work that has been delegated to you is a very important skill for you to gain. From there it is just a matter of time before you move up to the next level of responsibility and success.

Being Accountable

Following the guidelines for effective teamwork generates trust and respect. When team members follow the principles of trust and respect, trust has a way of permeating the thinking of every team member. From that mind-set of trust, the team moves to a higher level – that important realm of accountability among teammates.

In being accountable to each other, everyone takes on the responsibility of leading the team toward the accomplishment of its goal. At this



level, team effectiveness and efficiency are multiplied in numerous ways:

- “Buy-in” or “ownership” of the team increases dramatically.
- Team members develop skills and abilities that contribute to the team and enhance other areas of their lives as well.
- Creativity abounds; new and innovative solutions are generated.
- Team members focus on the team’s goals like never before.
- Team members provide feedback, accept constructive criticism, and address issues head-on.
- Everyone works together; team members are receptive to others’ ideas and they praise and encourage the contributions of others.
- The team makes significant progress toward the accomplishment of the goal within the given budget and by the deadline.

Teams are most effective and productive when they work from the basis of accountability – accountability to oneself, accountability to the other team members, accountability to the team leader, and accountability to the organization

itself. Not only does a climate of accountability encourage each member to do his or her best, it helps the team pull together to meet its goal and deliver the desired results at a high standard of excellence.

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