

Professional Practice

The Leadership Imperative

Françoise Morissette

Leadership is the most important factor to the success of any enterprise. Leadership has and can change the world. It is the ultimate one size fits all lever that can be applied to anything, anywhere. A good leader can take an average group and turn it into a high-performing team. Unfortunately, a bad leader can equally ruin a great team. With bad leadership, a good system can tank.

In recent years, much noise has been made in the media and elsewhere about a leadership "deficit". As 9.2 million baby-boomers prepare to retire within the next 10 years, this problem is bound to intensify. Moreover, succession planning has not been extensive enough with the results that Generations X and Y are not quite ready to take over. Everywhere, Canadians worry that the leadership supply simply cannot meet current and future demand.

To find solutions to this serious problem, my colleague Amal Henein, CHRP, and I conducted extensive research with a representative sample of 295 exceptional leaders from coast to coast in all sectors of society. These accomplished individuals shared what contributed to their own development, and made recommendations to expand national leadership capacity. Secondly, we spoke to 66 professionals involved with a variety of leadership development programs. These experts described best practices and provided insight on optimal program infrastructure.

It takes a considerable investment of time, effort and resources to produce the quantity and quality of leaders required as leaders are not made in a day, but every day. In order to ensure an abundant supply of capable leaders, Canada must generate a critical leadership mass. This represents a paradigm shift from the hero who appears during a crisis, saves the day and sails into the sunset. Knights in shining armour are simply too few and far between to meet society's vast leadership needs. A more appropriate paradigm to today's reality is Canadian Geese flying in a V formation: every bird taking turns at leading and following.

HR professionals are increasingly tasked to put in place leadership development infrastructures and to shape the organizational environment so it is conducive to leadership emergence, excellence and retention. Presiding over leadership development is both a privilege and a responsibility. With the deficit intensifying, leadership and its development should be the number one priority of the HR community.

Optimal Program Architecture

Leadership development is a major enterprise, not a casual undertaking. Sending someone on a two-day training program and expecting him/her to return as Martin

Luther King is unrealistic. It takes time to achieve mastery and to hone a sound leadership judgment.

The most appropriate model is the apprenticeship system because it combines theory, practice and coaching. Apprenticeship acknowledges that proficiency doesn't happen overnight but evolves progressively, from the inside out. Consequently, the best program architecture includes the following components:

- *Education*: to acquire frameworks, models, concepts etc. It's about building knowledge.
- ▪ *Practice*: to hone leadership skills through carefully selected and monitored applications. It's about building know how.
- ▪ *Self-Discovery*: to understand one's identity as a leader and become aware of motivations and impact. It's about building insight.
- ▪ *Support*: to alleviate growing pains and sustain development with the help of mentoring, coaching, etc. It's about building sustainability.
- ▪ *Community*: to minimize the sense of isolation and provide opportunities for sharing, problem solving, networking etc. It's about building synergy.

Experts interviewed stated that education, in and of itself, cannot produce proficient leaders. They need experience, feedback, guidance etc. It takes time and effort to produce well-rounded leaders. Therefore, HR professionals must look at leadership development from a system, not a program perspective.

Organizational Environment

Organizations can play a significant role in creating an environment that fosters leadership emergence, excellence and retention. It starts by making leadership visible and important, and setting up structures to facilitate the free flow of people and ideas required for effective leadership.

A caring atmosphere conducive to learning is also important, for growth never happens without a few mishaps. Finally, providing a climate buzzing with possibilities and opportunities is prime. Like gardeners, organizations need to create conditions for the leadership seed to grow and mature; this requires an attentive and solicitous eye. HR professionals play an important role in crafting policies, procedures and talent management systems that contribute to creating a fertile ground for "growing leaders".

Conclusion

As workforce and leadership shortages deepen, HR professionals will be required to come up with innovative and ingenious solutions which demand strategic, lateral and systems thinking. Are we up to the challenge? What can we do to get ourselves ready? How can we enhance our own leadership capacity?

Francoise Morissette is presenting [Enhancing Leadership Capacity - The New HR Imperative](#) in Vancouver on November 27. For more information on this and other workshops, please refer to BC HRMA's [Calendar of Events](#).

About the Author:

Francoise Morissette, M.Ed, P.C.C., has been a Faculty Member at Queen's University's prestigious Industrial Relations Centre since 1994, and was made a Fellow in 2006. She has played a key role in developing and implementing a suite of new OD programs, intended for practitioners. As a Human Resources Consultant, Françoise is a major contributor to the field of Organizational Development. Her consulting practice takes her across Canada and internationally. Françoise offers services that enhance the performance of organizations, teams and individuals. Her main area of expertise is Leadership Development; through a variety of interventions, Françoise helps leaders and organizations to enhance their leadership capacity.

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