

LEADERSHIP Excellence

Warren Bennis



THE MAGAZINE OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY

JANUARY 2010



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Prickly Pursuit



Leaders and followers frequently have a precarious relationship, increasingly one of mutual interdependence, where roles and boundaries blur in the talent-driven ecosystem.

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Lead Learning

Achieve high performance.



by Michael Beer

LEADERS FACE CONSTANT turmoil, and many react non-strategically and head down the wrong path or are frozen with fear and fail to adapt.

And yet certain leaders adapt to new circumstances and achieve sustained high performance. Resilient enterprises are *high commitment, high performance* (HCHP) organizations that achieve three outcomes: *performance alignment, psychological alignment, and the capacity for learning and change*. They embody the principles—and results—to which all leaders aspire. They serve customers with care. They give employees work that offers dignity, personal growth, and meaning. They afford shareholders good and steady returns. And they develop reputations as extraordinary companies, recognized for contributions to all stakeholders.

Take Six Key Actions

To transform your organization into a HCHP system, take four key actions:

1. Build the leadership team. CEOs can learn much from their senior team and employees who are in touch with the day-to-day realities of the marketplace and the efficacy of the execution. Transformational CEOs come to rely on their *leadership team*. This requires a sustained effort to build that team and develop together a vision of the firm—the purpose, strategy, and values; the legacy they want to leave; and the principles for organizing and managing.

2. Connect authentically. To mobilize followers on a journey to HCHP, leaders must have a *high moral purpose*. Their aspirations must go far beyond the usual financial and strategic goals. Leaders must reveal *who they are, what they believe in, and what higher purpose motivates them* to engage people emotionally. This enables people to hope that their own aspirations to do something meaningful and important—to leave a legacy—will be fulfilled by committing to the leader's agenda for change.

3. Advocate a direction. Transformational leaders have a strong point of view

about strategy, values, direction, and how to organize the enterprise, and they advocate a new, long-term vision for the company, how it will compete, and the management philosophy and values by which it will be governed. They also ensure the business and value components are consistent and reinforce each other by defining the animating beliefs that will govern all decisions. And HCHP leaders are visible, engaging people in a dialogue.

4. Inquire. Leaders need to actively solicit unvarnished feedback and promote an honest fact-based dialogue, or inquiry. HCHP leaders implement disciplined processes for feedback and reflection. Without inquiry, leaders can't learn that their plans and vision are doomed to failure. Inquiry prevents values from backfiring when disenchantment rises. It enables leaders to *evaluate the gap* between the espoused strategy and principles and the reality experienced by others. Inquiry buys trust and makes the vision credible.

5. Confront conflict and manage tensions. Bringing different views into the open to seek the best integrative solution enables creative problem solving,

continuous improvement, and *sustained performance*.

Although changing a system inevitably involves personal losses in power, relationships, rewards, competence, esteem, and identity—which will be resisted—these sentiments are vital. Without emotional conflict, you can't establish the *new moral order* needed to

transform to an HCHP enterprise.

6. Develop a partnership with employees. Power asymmetries reduce collaboration and commitment, reducing the potential for value creation. So leaders must create a *partnership culture* in which participation in decisions is not based on position, but on knowledge and proximity to the problem. Commitment to mission and reduced hierarchical barriers enable people to engage spontaneously and fluidly to solve mission-critical problems.

Leading transformation is about enabling leaders and their people to learn together what problems they must face and actions they must take. If the leader engineers a collective learning process, transformation to an HCHP system will be a great success. LE

Michael Beer is chairman of TruePoint and professor emeritus of business administration at Harvard Business School and author or co-author of nine books, including *High Commitment, High Performance* (Jossey-Bass/Wiley). Visit www.truepoint.com.

ACTION: Create a high performance team.

