

Ask Izzy



I am keen to develop a leadership initiative into our organisation. The current structure is very "hierarchical" and I am concerned that the current CEO is from the school of thought that believes "leaders are born, not made" from what he said the other day – what would you suggest to get him on side and to get a programme off the ground?

First of all, you're not alone – a new HR or L & D Director is often brought in (presumably because the organisation sees the need) but then struggles to get his or her ideas implemented.

1. Rigor and Proof

To avoid anyone applying the "pink and fluffy" label to your programme make sure the approach you take has its foundations in rigorous and well researched facts. Research, backed up by proven methods and results will be acceptable to even the toughest CEO. So show them the evidence – how have other organisations used this approach, what have they achieved? A good training partner can share results and how different approaches have worked – and I'm not talking about "happy sheets" – this should be demonstrable improvements in the business or organisation's performance. How have others, for example:

- *Improved productivity (increased revenues, margin, profit)*
- *Saved the organisation money*
- *Made it easier to attract the best talent*
- *Reduced staff turnover (show how much money that has saved)*
- *Reduced sickness absence or stress related sickness*

People embarking on a leadership programme need to know what's in it for them, personally, as well as the organisation. Using a 360 tool up front to provide accurate, data based feedback will help you enormously. In the same way that you need to know your weight at the start of a diet or fitness regime, managers and leaders need to know where they're starting from.

The Kouzes and Posner Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) is a great tool. At Masterclass we've used it in thousands of different situations – from some of the biggest commercial organisations and public sector bodies to small, owner managed companies – and we've used it across different nationalities and cultures.

I would certainly recommend it but use an external provider to give the feedback. Why? You're dealing with sensitive data and sensitive souls. It's much easier for a senior executive to accept

feedback on their leadership behaviour from an external consultant who specialises in this than from his or her HR or L & D Director or Manager – however skilled you are. It may take more of your budget but the chances of you succeeding are significantly higher. You're also, by using an external facilitator in a coaching capacity, getting people to see the benefits of one to one coaching.

2. The Beauty of Language

Another advantage in using a 360 up front is that people incorporate the language of leadership behaviours in their every day lives. As Kouzes and Posner point out, leaders "challenge the process" - they look for new and innovative ways of working. It's not difficult to get people using a phrase such as this when looking at solving problems or dealing with issues in their own business..

We worked with a global IT company which used the Situational Leadership model in its US operation. When their CEO transferred to the UK he wanted his team to embrace this approach, too. Getting people to understand the different management and leadership styles got people talking in a new language – they recognised and understood what was meant by S1 or S4 management style – they could relate to it, it made sense, it became part of their culture.

3. Feedback, Feedback, Feedback

Practice doesn't make perfect, it makes habit. You need practice with feedback to get close to perfection. If you're introducing a leadership programme you need to think how people will give and receive feedback on the new behaviours and approaches. Spending time working on these skills is critical to the success of any programme, but particularly one around leadership development.

Coach your managers and leaders in the skills of both GIVING and RECEIVING feedback. Intellectually it's not difficult, but without the opportunity to practice and perfect the skills, your investment may not deliver the returns you want.

Often we will include mini, bite sized sessions on how to give and receive feedback when delivering Kouzes and Posner LPI sessions. And never assume that people know how to do it – they don't. And they'll avoid giving the "difficult" feedback on people's behaviour.

One manager once said "I've been told I give off the wrong vibes" – not surprisingly he was at a loss to know what to do about it. Mind you, having worked with him I could see what his boss was trying to say.... But we got there in the end!

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