



How Will You Grow As A Leader?

once posed a question to a group of CEOs and business owners: “How did you learn to be a leader?”

The best answer I received was “I watched what my Dad did and then did the opposite.” An interesting insight and a few others nodded their heads in agreement. Apart from this, however, there was no response. This highlights what I’ve found is a common problem: there’s a lack of knowledge on how to intentionally grow as a leader. This is a problem because you can’t sustainably

grow your business without growing the leadership skills of people in the business (including those of the CEO).

Let me explain this by looking at a common scenario: someone has just been promoted at work. We all know that the nature of their work relationships will change in that former peers may become direct reports and former bosses will now be peers. This alone would be challenging enough, but the unfortunate truth from a leadership-skill perspective is that the skills they

exhibited to earn their promotion may not be the same ones they’ll need in their new role. In fact, their old skills could be very wrong for their new role. So, by what process does one identify and develop new leadership skills?

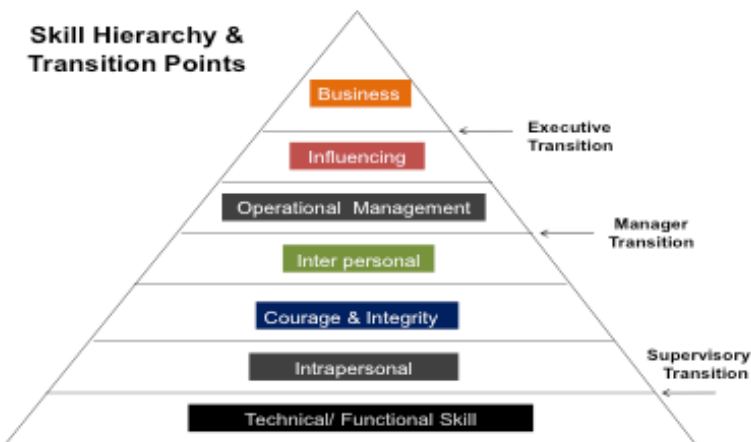
The process I use can be described as follows:

- Step 1: Assess where the person is at.
- Step 2: Decide what’s important for them to be successful in the new role.
- Step 3: Identify the new skills required by Step 2.
- Step 4: Coach the person on how to develop those skills.

The process is rather simple, yet I am often asked, how does one figure out what to work on?

Here is a simple competency hierarchy that I’ve found useful. It explains what happens when people move up the corporate ladder. What I like is it starts people thinking about what skills they’ll need in their new role. It also eliminates the widespread belief that “leaders are born not made.” In this model, all skills are learnable, and everyone who has the will, can improve their skills.

Skill Hierarchy & Transition Points



“A SMALL CRACK IN YOUR SELF-AWARENESS NOW CAN LATER BECOME A FATAL FLAW WITH THE INCREASING SCALE AND COMPLEXITY OF A HIGHER MANAGEMENT ROLE.”

1. TECHNICAL/FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

These are the most important skills at the Individual Contributor level. Most of us are hired because of these skills. We get ahead by performing them well, plus showing some other skills that indicate a drive for results, customer focus, and personal integrity.

2. INTRAPERSONAL SKILLS

These skills become more important as we move up through the skill hierarchy. While you may not have had to develop skills like self-awareness at level one, you will certainly come under pressure to do so now. This is a direct result of the increasing scale and complexity of the higher management role. With your performance being assessed by your ability to direct and influence others, you may have to learn to express your feelings more openly and understand what “triggers” your emotional reactions. A small crack in your self-awareness now can later become a fatal flaw with the increasing scale and complexity of a higher management role.

3. COURAGE & INTEGRITY SKILLS

These skills are very important at all stages of the skill hierarchy. They are often the “price of admission” from one stage of management to the next. Skills which demonstrate courage would include conflict management and addressing poor performance while those for integrity would include meeting commitments and working for the common good. Your ability to act as a role model for corporate values will also figure prominently in your senior management performance.

4. INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

“Getting work done through others” is going to be a key skill set as you move

into the higher management roles. These skills range from your approachability to your active listening skills to your ability to develop teams. Managing diverse relationships—whether they are customers, bosses, direct reports, or colleagues—will also be an important part of your role. Identifying and resolving conflicts between these parties will be increasingly important.

5. OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS

The management skills of planning, leading, organising, and controlling are in this domain. They are the skills which primarily deliver results in terms of customer satisfaction, employee commitment, and business profitability. Four skills are common to all management levels in this domain: setting challenging objectives, making timely decisions, setting clear priorities, and providing coaching support. There will also be an increasing emphasis on your tactical skills for implementing change.

6. INFLUENCING SKILLS

These skills are a higher order than the Interpersonal Skills domain. They have been singled out because they are more important as you become a Senior Manager. Influencing skills are particularly valuable in those situations where you have some power but no authority. This would include relationships with bosses or colleagues in other businesses or corporate headquarters where you are building a consensus to move forward together. Some of the skills also stress political savvy and the degree of comfort you feel in the presence of your top executives. Your ability to present proposals which not only deliver bottom-line results but

are consistent with business values will be critical.

7. BUSINESS SKILLS

These skills appear to be the rarest and the most difficult to develop which perhaps explains why they are the most valuable. While moving through the management hierarchy can enhance your understanding of the business, it may not necessarily test that you have the intellectual horsepower or learning agility required for making complex decisions. Creating a strategy for gaining and sustaining a competitive advantage will call for skills like detachment, creativity, vision, and tactical execution. Getting the right people into managerial roles, building high performance teams, and focusing on the bottom line are the key skills at this level.

In conclusion, using a 360-degree assessment of skills in the above hierarchy model is useful for developing leadership in a variety of situations:

- 1. For Managers** - it helps them make a successful transition into a higher management role.
- 2. For current Executives** - it helps them assess the effectiveness of their higher management skills and identify skill development priorities to help them improve their performance.
- 3. For aspiring Top Executives** - it identifies the “watch out” areas and the skills they’ll need to develop to prepare them for senior level appointments.
- 4. For current CEOs** - it offers the candid feedback they need to improve their own skills. ♦