

You Bet On People, Not On Strategies

Lawrence Bossidy, retired CEO of now Honeywell, famously once said, “I am convinced that nothing we do is more important than hiring and developing people. At the end of the day, you bet on people, not on strategies.”

That’s correct. People. Not blueprints or strategies, but people. Salil Deshmukh, Sr. VP Human Resources at Reliance, stood against the notion of widespread failure in leadership development strategies. Do they succeed in organizations? Do they fail? These are potent questions, which require potent answers, and the Mettl Webinar platform allowed for just that. He was speaking at the weekly Mettl.com webinar.

So, what does make for a great leadership development strategy?

Three types of people to be more precise –

- Coaches
- High Potential Candidates for Leaders, and
- The Leaders themselves

Considering order, it only makes sense to start with coaches, and what an imperative segment they are to everything in question.

For any leadership development strategy to work, it is essential to follow a structured approach of support and feedback; just as a King’s Counsel – a battery of advisors that added to a ruler’s wisdom.

While leaders are individual people, it is the coach-coachee dynamic that really makes leadership work – something largely in play at Salil’s turf, Reliance. In fact, the Sr.

VP went on to add that the performance of potential candidates quadrupled under the influence of a coach, making the latter a strong catalyst to the former's growth.

“The best of coaching is done on the candidate's terms,” announced the Reliance man. “Let them set the agenda, goals and milestones. We're merely there to make them more aware of their desires, make them more responsible toward taking action.”

Then again, who are these high potential candidates we talk about? Every organization has their own style of coaching, and coaches are with versatility used in multiple areas.

These include the development of second line leaders; high performance individuals with the ability to step into leadership roles when the situation demands it.

Additionally, coaches could also serve to bolster pre-existing leaders to take charge of certain aspects in business, where leadership qualities are in strong demand.

However, what rung the boldest truth in the Mettl Webinar was that the program must be treated in an elitist manner. Why? It is a privilege, an honour, and must be given as much importance. If everyone could just saddle up and board the leadership development gravy train, it's more likely to end up an orientation program than anything.

What of preferential treatment then? While the question by itself sounds ethically wrong, there is no going around the fact that leaders and high potentials deserve more butter than the rest. It does not imply factors such as monetary value or added benefits, but is more in line with satiating thirst. This implies the main goal of the program, i.e. to become leaders.

If one does, in fact, give would be leaders a platform for aggressive growth, it only makes sense to feed the hunger that comes with said growth. In these cases, it is wiser to allow candidates of the program an opportunity to skip a couple of steps in the

career growth path, to reach positions of greater responsibilities regardless of experience.

While some may argue that experience is not a value to undermine, Salil was in full support of the idea. Simply because, a coach exists to counsel leaders. And of course, a coach always comes with his or her nurtured experience.

So, who are these coaches that we keep talking about? There are two routes to take, and both come with their pros and cons.

Think HR as a Leadership Development Coach, and have a look at their pros:

- They bring an objective view of the organizational needs
- They can align development of individuals to the strategies of the business
- These benefits do make HR a candidate for a lethal coach, but there are some cons to consider.

One especially, the natural distrust of an employee toward HR; this because of their hierarchical relationship with people higher-up in the organizational food chain. The reason pushes many to consider the option of hiring an external coach, who again come with his or her pros and cons.

What matters the most are the benefits. Is your organization open to nurture leaders? To converge intelligence and emotional quotients onto spiritual quotients? After all, an alignment between individual values and organizational values are what makes progress tick.

At Reliance, a 60-70% alignment statistic marked for excellence in performance by an individual.

In the end, it's about what you want. Internal coaches can be strong, and can deliver strong results. They know what the organization wants, what the business is.

However, their success as coaches depend largely on their relationship with the leaders, and how HR, in general, is perceived in said organization.

To rephrase what Larry Bossidy said, “I am convinced that nothing we do is more important than developing leaders. At the end of the day, people drive organizational growth, not leadership development strategies.

Thanks