



What 82% of Leaders Get Wrong

5 Essential Leadership Practices for Sustainable High Performance

By David Yesford, Senior Vice President, Wilson Learning Worldwide

It's disconcerting to consider that merely 18% of managers demonstrate a high level of talent for managing others, because the flip side of that statistic means 82% of managers are not effective at leading people. While this statistic is startling, it is really not hard to understand.

The Challenge

When you talk to mid-level leaders and ask them to look back over their careers, most would tell you they didn't necessarily aspire to become a manager. Their focus was on their chosen function (accounting, engineering, operations, etc.), they performed very well, and that "got them promoted." What's the problem?

If individuals have given little thought to becoming a manager, it is very likely they have given little thought to what it means to be a leader. These managers performed well enough as a first-level manager to follow the natural

progression to move into a mid-level leader role. The problem is they arrive with little or no idea of what it takes to succeed at that next level. In a mid-level leader role, just achieving performance goals is not sufficient to be effective. The real challenge is how to lead people to perform in a way that increases their ability to do it themselves.

Only 18% of managers demonstrate a high level of talent for managing others.

—Gallup poll, 2016

Mid-level leaders need a clear vision on what they are trying to accomplish as a leader, as well as a solid game plan to utilize their talents to achieve and sustain that vision.

Performance with Fulfillment

There are many things a leader can do to drive high performance—in the short term. To achieve sustainable high performance over time, employees must find a sense of purpose and meaning in their performance and believe they are contributing value to both themselves and the organization. We call this performance with fulfillment.

The 5 Essential Leadership Practices

Research has shown that all employees, no matter what generation, have five questions that need to be answered before they experience true performance with fulfillment. We have converted these questions to five essential leadership practices: Direction, Goals, Feedback, Recognition, and Support.

These key leadership practices provide the leader with a process to create a positive work environment in which performance with fulfillment flourishes. Being intentional in using all five practices engages others and creates a two-way dialogue around the “what” and the “how,” and, most importantly, the “why.”

1. Direction—Where are we going?

In the context of driving strategy and creating an environment of performance with fulfillment, we express direction as an equation. Direction equals vision plus strategy.

Vision is what the company aspires to be. It may be described as vision, mission, purpose, etc. Vision tends to be very stable. Once an organization has defined who it is and where it wants to go, it tends to keep that big picture intact.

Strategy is the blueprint, or broad plan, for achieving the company’s vision. If the vision reflects what the company strives to be, the strategy reflects how the company is going to get there. The strategy must shift as environmental drivers change, so it tends to be very flexible.

2. Goals—What is expected of me?

Goals are the first step in operationalizing the direction. A goal is an outcome or work unit that an individual is expected to deliver for the company to help it achieve its direction. Obtaining commitment to goals is critical, particularly since goals help drive the company in the direction it needs to go.

For people to be committed, they need to be inspired. A leader who is clear on their team’s fulfillment can create a dialogue about what is compelling and why, building the commitment needed to achieve challenging goals.

3. Feedback—How am I doing?

In many companies, people understand the company’s direction and their own goals. Their goals are aligned with the direction, but they still struggle to execute on the strategy. Effective feedback is key to bridging this gap and ensuring that everyone is doing what they need to do to help the company deliver the promise of its direction. Feedback is a key ingredient in ensuring that people experience performance with fulfillment.

4. Recognition—What is in it for me?

Recognition helps people feel valued for their contributions. It is the fuel to maintain people’s interest and motivation for ongoing effort. To advance a goal, leaders need to understand the types of recognition that are most compelling to those responsible for the goal. By providing meaningful recognition to teams and individuals, as appropriate, leaders can foster performance with fulfillment.

People want to know that when they perform well, others see and appreciate their accomplishments. Recognition is how leaders can demonstrate this appreciation and show people that their contributions matter.

5. Support—Where do I go for help?

Support means taking action to strengthen the ability of the work unit(s) to achieve critical goals with a high degree of both performance and fulfillment. The mid-level leader is the person in the organization who spans the boundaries of different functions and departments. The leader’s role is to ensure productive relationships within their span of control and with other functional areas. In some situations, they may need to negotiate with other areas, or may need to assist their work unit as they do so. The leader must also anticipate potential challenges, and then address them before they become barriers.

Sustainable Performance: What's Required?

As leaders work to help the organization perform at its best, they also need to understand that employees want to be involved in work that is meaningful and makes a difference. Highly effective leaders have the perspective to achieve performance with fulfillment for themselves and their team, as well as model the five key factors to build capability in their team's ability to do it themselves. What are you doing to ensure the leaders in your organization are on the path to become purpose-centered leaders?

"We should stop letting endless statistics and the latest leadership gimmick blind us to the most basic human motives such as respect, meaning, and fulfillment. People leaving the office with a sense of fulfillment every day will want to come back, focus on tough projects, and work hard: their intrinsic motivation will drive them to continue doing their best day after day, year after year."

—"The Real Crisis In Leadership," *Forbes*, Sept. 9, 2018

About the Author

David Yesford is Senior Vice President of Wilson Learning Worldwide. With nearly 30 years of experience developing and implementing human performance improvement solutions around the world, Mr. Yesford brings valuable experience, strategic direction, and global perspective to his work with clients. Over the years, Mr. Yesford has held strategic roles in Wilson Learning's core content areas of Sales and Leadership, as well as e-Learning and Strategic Consulting. He is the contributing author of several books including *Win-Win Selling*, *Versatile Selling*, *The Social Styles Handbook*, and *The Sales Training Book 2*. He has also been published in numerous business publications throughout the United States, Europe, Latin America, and Asia Pacific. Mr. Yesford frequently speaks at international conferences and summits, providing insight on a variety of issues including sales and sales strategy, leadership, employee and customer engagement, brand, and strategy implementation.

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