



CUTTINGS...

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Compiled and edited by Geof Cox

Welcome to this latest edition of Cuttings.

One of our current major projects is the delivery of a rolling two-year talent development programme for a major European petrochemicals company. It has been running since 2012 and in the next few weeks I will be working with the ninth and tenth cohorts on their final workshop before they graduate. Then in October, the twelfth cohort will be starting in Vienna.

The programme represents a major investment for the company, combining workshops, action learning, coaching, mentoring and development centres in an integrated programme over two years. The results for the organisation have more than met their initial hopes and targets, so this is a great example of an organisation seeing the pay off of investing in their first line leaders - an approach which is reflected in the lead article in this Cuttings.

Geof Cox

Investing in First Line Leaders

First-line leaders are the largest and arguably most important group of leaders in any organisation: they account for 50-60% of the management team and directly supervise approximately 80% or more of employees. They are key to execution, whether that is business results, employee engagement and retention, customer satisfaction or change strategy. They are in charge of enabling the maximum number of employees to succeed. And, as has been commented on in a number of reports "employees leave managers, not organisations".

Evidence suggests that over the past few years there has been an upward trend in spending on leadership development for first-line leaders. According to numbers from Forum, the total annual investment for this level is increasing faster than for middle or senior levels. But with about 1/3 of the spend going to each of the leadership levels (first-line, mid-level and senior, executive, and high potential), the fact remains that the per-leader spend on first-line leaders is still lower than on their more senior colleagues.

In this edition

Investing in First Line Leaders The Forum Corporation have pulled together some research findings on the value of investing in this group.

Most effective Group Size for Dialogue Some empirical research that shows small groups are better than large ones.

Management is not a long term goal for GenY According to Penna research, we may be misinterpreting the career goals of Gen Y, which could leave a shortage of managers.

Public Course course programme dates for 2015.

And **Snippets** to provoke your thinking and reflection.

Snippets

A collection of thought provokers and quotations...

The most powerful feedback is feedback that acknowledges contributions and great behaviour.

"Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant."

Robert Louis Stevenson

"Put your heart, mind and soul into even your smallest acts. This is the secret of success."

Swami Sivananda

"Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated."

Confucius

It is at the first-line leader level that people skills clearly contribute more to success than technical skill. In some cases, where cognitive skills are to the forefront in the workforce, it is as much as an 80/20 split. In all situations it is probably not less than 50/50. Ironically, despite the use of more sophisticated performance and potential management systems, most promotions to the first-line level are still made on the strength of technical skills and competence.

So, according to a range of studies 58-80% of people move into a people leadership role without the relevant skill or a development programme. Whilst at the same time, we have evidence that top performing companies have a higher use of good people-leadership practices when compared to low performers in their own industry.

So, according to the evidence investment in first-line leader development is growing, it is the place where there is the potential for the highest payoff in terms of business results, but it is still under-resourced and under-prioritised - there is still a massive potential opportunity for improvement.

People skills are fundamental

As we see above, people skills is the fundamental building block for effective first-line leadership. There is irrefutable evidence that employee engagement leads to better bottom line business results and that it is the employee's immediate manager who has the greatest impact on engagement.

The first-line leader is responsible for getting results from other people, not just from themselves. One of my own comments when leading discussions with managers is that performance management **IS** their job, not just another task to perform. The key skills of coaching, giving feedback, encouraging, influencing, building teams, prioritising work, problem solving, motivating, observing, coordinating, project leading, supervising, collaborating, etc. are all skills that need to be learned or developed, as they typically do not exist in the sole-contributor or technical roles.

Add to this that many first-line leaders will be involved in cross cultural or cross functional working for the first time, and are exposed to more strategic and complex thinking, then the leap is clearly great. We fail in our responsibilities as senior leaders of organisations if we continue to use a 'sink or swim' approach by throwing people in at the deep end with no support or training. These skills can all be learned.

If there is no intervention to show the way, people will either copy what they see others doing (usually replicating bad practices as a result) or continue to do what they have always done (and end up interfering or micro-managing). Take just one example: in studies conducted by Focus, in organisation after organisation, roughly 80% of first-line leader activities are of a "technical" or "individual contributor" nature. They are continuing to do their 'old job' and not focus on their new people-leadership responsibilities. And they do this even though they themselves feel that many of these activities do not deliver value to the

"Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible."

Francis of Assisi

"The quality of our expectations determines the quality of our actions."

André Godin

"It is the eye which makes the horizon."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Time of stress and difficulty are seasons of opportunity when the seeds of progress are sown."

Thomas F. Woodlock

"Whether you think you can, or you think you can't - you're right."

Henry Ford

"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."

Winston Churchill

"It is literally true that you can succeed best and quickest by helping others to succeed."

Napoleon Hill

"We will be known forever by the tracks we leave."

American Indian Proverb

"The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak."

Hans Hofmann

"He that does good to another does good also to himself."

Seneca

"Don't follow your dreams; chase them."

Richard Dumb

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

Eleanor Roosevelt

organisation. They just don't know what else to do, or how to do it.

USEFUL LINKS

[Click here](#) to download a report on first-line leaders by The Forum Corporation which inspired this article

New Directions designs and delivers development programmes for first-line leaders, from individual skills workshops to strategic talent development programmes. [Click here](#) for some examples and information about our services.

Most Effective Group Size for Dialogue

A posting by David Gurteen on LinkedIn alerted me to some very interesting research carried out by Nicholas Fay and Simon Garrod of the University of Glasgow and Jean Carletta of the University of Edinburgh, and published in the American Psychological Society journal.

Their findings show that in 5-person groups, the communication is like dialogue and members are influenced most by those with whom they interact in the discussion. However, in 10-person groups, the communication is like monologue and members are influenced most by the dominant speaker.

The difference in mode of communication is explained in terms of how speakers in the two sizes of groups design their utterances for different audiences.

David Gurteen added his own observations through trial and error that the ideal size of a group for interactive conversation is four people. When more than five people in a group, one or two people tend to dominate; the conversation breaks into two, even three; frequently one person is totally cut out of the interaction and there is little energy in the group.

He also observed that to have a good conversation people need to be in touching distance of each other and equidistant.

My own experience from facilitating large group dialogue and interpersonal skills workshops is that the best and most interactive conversations take place in groups of 3, 4 or 5 with no tables.

Interesting, then, that that most standard conference room layouts, whether they are in corporate or hotel settings, have oblong, boardroom style tables or large round tables seating 7 or 8 or more people. And it is so difficult to organise a set up with small round tables, or to get the tables removed completely. It's as if conference rooms are designed to stifle dialogue...

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[Click here](#) to read the original article from Psychological Science.

"Learning is weightless, a treasure you can always carry easily."

Chinese Proverb

"Don't search for answers because you would not be able to live them. Live the questions. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer."

Reiner Maria Rilke

Management not a long-term goal for Gen Y

A mismatch between what employers think younger workers want from a job and what is actually most important to them could mean a critical shortage of managers in ten years' time.

Becoming a manager and leading a team isn't an important ambition for Gen Y, according to a survey from HR consultancy firm Penna, whilst a fifth of employers believe this to be the case.

The survey revealed that the top three career priorities for Gen Y employees were: 'earning a great salary', 'being totally fulfilled and happy in my work' and 'to have achieved a great life work balance.'

So we cannot just assume that the younger workforce are automatically going to want to fill the shoes of todays' leaders and managers. Equally, when it comes to short term motivators, things like salary and progression opportunities continue to be important, but not necessarily in the priority expected. Younger Gen Y seem to be more interested in promotion and older Gen Y on salary, contrary to management expectation.

"Gen Y need to be listened to, otherwise organisations could be investing time and energy on

[Click here](#) to go to the LinkedIn post by David Gurteen

New Directions provides group facilitation services and interactive skills training. [Click here](#) for information about our services.

development initiatives that don't connect or resonate with them, and that can have serious long term business consequences," according to Penna.

PM Editorial 30 Jan 2015

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Results Through People

A 5 day course on performance management and employee engagement.

London 7-11 September

Successfully Leading the Implementation of Projects

A 5 day course on the people side of project management.

London 14-18 September

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A 4 day course in strategic human resource management for the oil and gas sector.

Kuala Lumpur 20-23 October

Cuttings

Cuttings is free to subscribers, and has been published continuously for more than 20 years by *New Directions*, an international network of consultants and trainers who work together to learn, research, design and provide consulting and training in individual, management, and organisation development.

New Directions is also a partner in the European consulting organisation *Learning Consortium* who are the providers of one of the leading personal development courses in interpersonal skills, *Focus on Influence*.

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