



Three-Dimensional Leadership Development

by Seth Lieberman and Steve Krupp

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One of your strongest performers just resigned, citing greater opportunities for career growth at his new company. You suspect that several of his teammates are being wooed by recruiters. And for the third year in a row, your company's culture survey found that employees say they're not given enough training or career coaching.

With lifetime careers in a single organization a thing of the past, your employees want to develop the skills that will keep them marketable and further their careers. They see development as a right—table stakes in their relationship with their employer. In a tight talent market, companies that fail to provide development opportunities risk losing their future leaders.

To keep your best and brightest engaged and around, you need to take an active role in their development. We propose a three-dimensional approach to leadership development created by our colleagues David L. Dotlich, Peter C. Cairo, and Stephen H. Rhinesmith, the authors of *Head, Heart & Guts: How the World's Best Companies Develop Complete Leaders* (Jossey-Bass, 2006).

We have found that managers who practice three-dimensional development generate enormous benefits for the individuals who report to them, for the company, and for themselves. Employee satisfaction goes up, the risk of losing valued employees goes down, and teams achieve more. In this model, you, the manager, approach developing your direct reports along these three dimensions:

- **Through the head—strategically and logically.** You make strategic decisions about what skills your unit and your company need most.
- **Through the heart—in an empathetic and people-centered way.** You establish trusting relationships with your direct reports that allow an authentic exploration of capabilities and aspirations.
- **Through the guts—by taking calculated risks.** You place talented team members in stretch roles where they might succeed—but might not. And you continually challenge yourself to raise your performance to new levels.

THIS ARTICLE WILL HELP YOU DEVELOP YOUR DIRECT REPORTS' LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES:

- **Through the head—by focusing on the skills that will further your company's strategy**
- **Through the heart—by establishing open dialogues around your direct reports' capabilities and aspirations**
- **Through the guts—by taking calculated risks in placing talented direct reports in stretch roles**

1. USE YOUR HEAD: APPROACH DEVELOPMENT STRATEGICALLY

Your investment in developing leadership talent in your team should dovetail with your company's strategic priorities. What skills does the company need from its employees? Is it seeking to innovate? Go global? Become more customer-focused?

A sales director at a major telecommunications company noticed the company was shifting its focus from selling discrete products to offering customized solutions. Reasoning that this new focus would require customer-focused salespeople adept at bringing together different products from different groups, he knew he would need to help his team of aggressive "lone cowboy" salespeople develop their abilities to collaborate. He explained to his team why the solutions focus was essential for growing market share and profit margins. He led them in identifying how they would need to work with each other and with multiple product groups to deliver solutions to key customers. A year later, the team was selling significantly more multiproduct solutions that delivered more value to customers and brought in more revenue.

In most cases, you will want to emphasize the development of your strongest performers, without neglecting anyone altogether. "If you take seriously the idea that talent management is an investment," says Lisa Cavallaro, senior manager of worldwide leadership development at Cisco Systems, "you should be investing most of your time and resources with your high potentials

and top performers. In most situations, they are the ones who can provide the highest return on your investment.” Keep in mind that this is not a one-time choice: some employees who don’t have obvious high potential now may surprise you with how quickly they can grow.

Because not all roles are equally critical to your organization’s strategic success, focus on those people with the potential to take on the most important roles.

One global chemical company’s ability to fast-track development of general managers (GMs) from within the company has made it the envy of the industry. The president for Europe, Middle East, and Asia recognized that although the GM role was key to the company’s growth strategy, there weren’t enough people in the pipeline ready to move into these positions. After identifying people with GM potential, he asked each of his reports to tailor development plans for them, mentor them, and report back to him quarterly on progress. Within one year, the company had increased the pool of “ready now” candidates by 60%.

In your “head” leadership role, your focus is on developing the skills that will further your company’s strategy.

2. USE YOUR HEART: ENGAGE WITH PEOPLE AND DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS

A key reason people leave companies is they don’t feel their managers are supportive and committed to their ongoing success. The CFO of a fast-growth financial services firm experienced the retention power of engaging with employees on professional development when he helped the comptroller in a business unit increase her credibility with her GM clients; most of them had big egos and a tendency to ride roughshod over people they didn’t feel were in their league.

During a regular meeting with the comptroller, the CFO commented sympathetically that he did not see the GMs treating her as a partner. Because she trusted him, she shared with him that sometimes her e-mails weren’t answered and she felt “kept out of the business.” She said that her goal was to be regarded a true partner whose financial expertise the GMs actively sought out.

When the CFO asked her about the beginning of her working relationship with the GMs, she was able to see that she had begun by “taking orders.” The CFO helped

A SNAPSHOT OF 3-D DEVELOPMENT

1. USE YOUR HEAD

- Be clear what types of capabilities the company will require in the future.
- Educate your people about the strategy and industry/customer/company realities.
- Understand your company’s talent strategy and leverage opportunities.
- Make strategic investments in strong performers, high potentials, and the talent pipeline for mission-critical roles.

2. USE YOUR HEART

- Provide frank, constructive, regular performance feedback.
- Develop a trusting relationship as a coach and mentor.
- Create opportunities to talk about strengths, inadequacies, passions, and goals.
- Build realistic, meaningful development plans.

3. USE YOUR GUTS

- Let new people lead projects and learn from the experience.
- Look for stretch-role opportunities in other parts of the business.
- Raise the bar on performance—good enough is not enough.
- Be a role model by taking risks for your own development.

her craft a plan to elevate her stature with the GMs and followed up regularly with her to check on her progress. When the most difficult GM of the bunch solicited her opinion, she knew she’d mastered a new skill. Later, she confided in the CFO that she had been about to leave the company because of the tense working environment, but the demonstration of his belief in her and his willingness to help had convinced her to stay.

Survey after survey shows that employees are hungry for engagement with their leader. One of the most effective actions you can take is to build into your weekly routine a quick sharing of observations about what an employee has done well that week and where he or she could improve. If you keep the tone frank, two-way, and constructive, over time you’ll succeed in building a trusting relationship that allows employees to openly share views on their strengths, weaknesses, passions, and goals. This in turn allows both of you to build development plans that are tailored to the employee and implemented with enthusiasm.

In addition to quick feedback sessions, establish regular

development conversations with employees. “Talent development conversations need to occur over time, not as a one-shot activity appended to the performance management process,” says Cavallaro. “People are much more likely to share their career aspirations and learning needs when they trust that through the year you are listening and taking their development seriously.”

In your “heart” leadership mode, you are a coach and a mentor—not out to “fix” your employees but to help them build their skills.

3. USE YOUR GUTS: HAVE THE COURAGE TO TAKE CALCULATED RISKS

Leading through your guts means helping your best employees gain exposure and experience in high-profile stretch roles or projects. Sometimes you have to take the calculated risk of putting a talented employee into a leadership position for which she may not be entirely ready. If she fails, it might reflect poorly on both of you—but that’s why it takes guts.

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As the vice president of services at a major technology organization listened to a direct report complain yet again about another function, she decided to have him lead a cross-unit team to address process and collaboration issues—even though she knew if he made mistakes, it would call her own judgment into question. The assignment was a real stretch for him: although a strong performer in general, he didn’t have a good track record as a team player.

Fortunately, the four-month project was a big success—providing clarity on expectations and processes

for teamwork. It developed her direct report’s ability to forge cross-functional partnerships, which continues to stand him in good stead as his career progresses. The vice president then upped the ante: she challenged him to significantly improve his partnerships with the sales and technology divisions in the coming six months. His success at this follow-up challenge resulted in an invitation to participate in a companywide high-potential program.

Keep in mind that taking risks means accepting that failure can happen. Help the employee understand what went right and wrong, but don’t dispense blame. If an experiment fails, your job is to lend support, offer insight, and turn the situation into a development opportunity.

As you approach development through the “guts” mode, look at your own performance: Are you taking on stretch challenges? Seeking exposure to new aspects of the business? Pushing yourself to new levels? The VP of services at the technology company continually raised the bar on her own performance, even as she challenged her team to improve. At the same time she was assigning her direct report to lead the cross-functional team, she had just volunteered to lead a high-profile companywide project to shape new business models for delivering services. Her own risk taking made her direct reports more comfortable taking risks themselves. ♦

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