



Averting the Leadership Development Crisis

The modern day catastrophe of American Business



Dr. Cliff Hurst

www.BeyondMorale.com

American corporations spend \$4 billion per year on developing the leadership skills of executives and senior managers. This commitment is time-intensive and costly. No doubt it is a wise investment. But something is missing from the payback of these efforts. Very little of that investment goes where leadership development is needed the most—at the level of the frontline supervisor.

American businesses are creating a leadership drought of their own making. As more and more boomers retire, leadership development, as commonly practiced, will cause a crisis unless you act now to avert it.



Think of a flash flood in the dry season. Only the first inch of topsoil gets wet. Very little of that precious water seeps through the hardened topsoil to nourish the roots of the plants growing there. All the rest becomes run-off. It's the same with leadership development—too much of it becomes run-off. If only we could get leadership development to seep deeply into all levels of the company....

Why hasn't this been done yet?

Well, it can be impractical and costly to provide leadership development to everyone throughout an organization—at least using the model of training and development that is pursued for senior leaders. Intensive executive leadership training typically lasts 3 weeks and can cost ten to twenty thousand dollars per participant, plus travel expenses. Given the sheer numbers of supervisors and their teams in any organization, these immersion methods of leadership development that work well for executives, are not practical for everyone.

We need an effective—and cost-effective--way to develop leaders at the team level.

The need is different at the front lines.

Leadership development at this level is not a solo act, based on the skills of one executive. At this level, leadership is more appropriately viewed as a partnership between the leader and the led. It needs to be implemented,

monitored, and practiced over time. It can't be just a one-time injection of theory, methodology, and skills. The ways we measure success should be different at this level, too. Financial results are neither the only nor the best yardstick to use. The effectiveness of leadership development at the team level needs to be measured by its impact on people and relationships, as well as by their performance.

At this level, leadership is more appropriately viewed as a partnership between the leader and the led.

What's been tried before

As a substitute to expensive off-sites, many companies have resorted to offering a medley of standalone one-to-two day workshops for leaders at the supervisory level. These are anecdotally helpful, but rarely do such programs succeed at transferring learning into performance. Such programs are too generic, too disjointed, too removed from day-to-day work for us to expect more than anecdotal improvement from them. Furthermore, they fail to engage all members of the team as leaders.

What about team building?

Most organizations strive to create engagement through an assortment of teambuilding activities and events. These, too, are anecdotally helpful. They're fun, too. But, most often, they are not measurably sustainable. Simulations and games can make valid learning points, but whether or not the learning from them is later applied to the work of the team is too often left to chance.

What, then, do frontline leaders need?

Let's look at what they need from their perspective.

Team members and team leads are busy. They work hard at juggling multiple priorities and dealing with multiple personalities of the people on their team. Chances are, supervisors were promoted to this position from within. And they were promoted because of their competence at doing the sorts of jobs they now supervise. This does not, by itself, qualify them to supervise others who now do those jobs. One natural consequence is that the newly prompted supervisor strives to be a super-doer rather than a leader of those who do. Their intentions are noble, but the consequences are predictably stressful for them, disempowering for their team, and ineffective over the long haul. The

supervisor and the team members need to learn to see their roles in a different light.

What's needed is an approach to leadership development that works for these busy, dedicated, well-meaning frontline supervisors and their teams.



Consequences of the way things are

High degrees of stress, frustration, and burnout at the supervisory level are all too common in many organizations today. Even a casual outsider can feel the stress in the air. These are good, hardworking people who care about what they do. Why are they so stressed? They simply aren't well-equipped for the job is why. You wouldn't send a plumber to fix a pipe without a pipe wrench. But, how often do we send newly appointed supervisors to their new role without adequately providing them the tools they need to do their job well?

The consequences of this improper preparedness extend beyond the well-being of the supervisor. Consequences also include lower engagement, poor morale, less initiative, and reduced productivity of those they supervise. Eventually—especially when the current recession ends—this will result in high turnover among team members. It is rightly said that people join companies, but leave supervisors.

Until we find better ways of developing leadership at the team level, we perpetuate the way things have always been. In the absence of better role models, supervisors will mimic the leadership style of those who supervised them, regardless of their effectiveness as leaders. They have no recourse but to lead as they were led.

Gallup estimates that the lost productivity of "actively disengaged" employees costs the US economy \$370 billion annually.

What's needed

We need a paradigm shift. We must recognize that leadership at the team level is not simply about a skill possessed by the leader. It is about the effectiveness of a team of people working in pursuit of a common purpose.

Different performance measures

Performance needs to be measured differently at this level than at the senior level of management. At the senior level, the effectiveness of a leader can be determined by a variety of widely accepted measures of organizational performance. These are most often financial measures. At the small group level, however leadership needs to be assessed differently. It can be measured best by the attitudes, feelings, and morale of the people who comprise the team. If frontline leaders focus on the morale of those on their team, then measurable outcomes beyond morale can be attained. But, if morale is ignored, and focus instead is placed on those other measured outcomes, then success is harder to attain. Even when it is attained, it is rarely sustainable.

Meaningful measures of employee engagement

You may be asking, but how do you measure employee engagement? Isn't it one of those soft, squishy concepts? Not really. The best way to measure it is to ask people about their needs at work. Do they feel valued? Do they have the skills and tools they need to do their job? Do they need and does their work provide an adequate level of variety and challenge? Then listen; don't defend their answers. You get even further if you ask questions about their needs, and more, in a systematic fashion. And by doing it in a way that encourages truthfulness and discourages the hiding of genuine feelings about

needs. This is what organizational climate surveys and 360-degree surveys and their like are failing to do. They may work well for certain purposes when used right. In fact, this is a big enough topic that an additional e-Book is written on the subject - *Why 360s No Longer Work and What You Can Do*, found at www.BeyondMorale.com website.

The financial performance of organizations with a highly favorable employee attitude is typically nearly 4x better than the financial performance of companies with poor employee attitudes.

From a 2004/2005 study by
Watson Wyatt USA

Just-in-time approach

The greatest cost of leadership development, as it is typically pursued today, is not the cost of the training, itself. Far greater costs stem from the loss of productivity that occurs when people are away from their work to attend training. Organizations run too lean today to allow as much time away from the job for growth and development as most HR professionals recommend. It's not a good thing, but it's fact and we must deal with it. What is needed is learning that can occur in small chunks, as time permits. Call it just-in-time learning. And to ensure that learning transfers to doing, people need to learn skills, techniques, and methods of

leadership that are all about *this team*, related to *this issue*, dealing with what's on *their plate*, *right now*. Artificial scenarios or theoretical case studies don't fit anymore.

Self-directed

The best learning is learning which is led by the team. In fact, learning to facilitate a meeting or learning session is a component of leadership development, itself. Now, if a training session is 3 days or 3 weeks long, it takes a professional, experienced facilitator to keep people engaged for the duration. But if training is just-in-time, occurs at the place of work, and lasts no more than one or two hours, and the curriculum is well-prepared and put together for them, then team members—with only a modest bit of practice—can facilitate the learning themselves. All it takes is that the content and method of delivery be spelled out in enough detail so that, with minimal preparation, any team member can do a credible job with the facilitation. This

empowers people. It motivates people. It develops people. And it works. The person on the team who learns the most is the one who prepared and delivers the training.

Leadership Development that fits a tight budget

Finally, if leadership is to be developed with everyone in the organization, it's got to be affordable for large

numbers of learners.

The best learning is learning which is led by the team.



What if...?

What if leadership development could be brought to the frontline, where they work, and in the context of the problems confronting them today?

What if this could be combined with real-time performance feedback in such a way that ensures the transfer of learning to doing?

What if the ensuing results on employee engagement, morale, productivity, and team effectiveness were measurable and those measures were visible to everyone on the team?

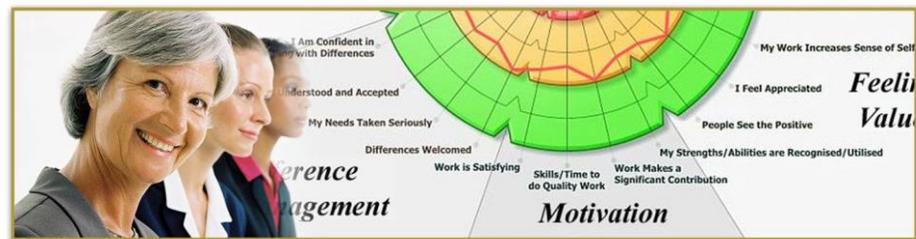
How much of a difference would that make?

These are the very questions that motivated us to search for and develop an approach to leadership development that meets all of the criteria given in this e-Book. To summarize, a truly effective leadership development program ought to meet the following 8 criteria:

1. Addresses leadership development at all levels of the organization.
2. Approaches leadership as a partnership between the team leader and the team.
3. Contains built-in measures of performance and feedback mechanisms that are immediately available to those who need them.
4. Provides measures that are important to leadership at the team level.
5. Addresses issues that are of real and immediate concern to each team at any particular time.
6. Can be implemented just-in-time, in small chunks, as time permits.
7. Can be facilitated by non-professional trainers.
8. Is affordable.

A better way

If you are interested in developing the leadership skills in everyone, at all levels of your organization, then you will be interested in the work of Shay McConnon. His work and programs are available from Beyond Morale.



We could go into more detail about this program—its content, methods, and outcomes. But it may be best for you to see it for yourself.

If you agree with the precepts outlined in this e-Book, and you want to learn how top performing organizations have unlocked workforce strength, productivity and innovation, then you owe it to yourself and to your organization to check out *Beyond Morale™*. It has been proven over the last several years to be the answer to overcoming the leadership development crisis discussed here.



Here are two simple ways you can take the next step towards averting the leadership development crisis.

- To learn more about this unique program, go to: <http://www.beyondmorale.com/better-place-to-work/>.
- Or, call 336-288-8226 to have a *Beyond Morale™* expert arrange a web conference with you to demonstrate this time-tested proven breakthrough one-of-a-kind program.



About the Author



Dr. Cliff Hurst received his Bachelor of Arts from the University of Virginia and his MA and PhD from Fielding Graduate University. Prior to becoming a full-time faculty member of Westminster College, he operated his own Organizational Development consulting practice for 24 years. Dr. Cliff previously taught as an adjunct faculty at the University of San Francisco, UC Berkeley International Certificate program, and at Santa Clara University. He

also has prior experience in sales and marketing management in the recreational boating industry and served for 5 years as an officer of U.S. Marines.