

WOMEN LEADERS

HOW TO TAKE OWNERSHIP OF YOUR OWN CAREER



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WHY SHOULD YOU TAKE OWNERSHIP FOR YOUR OWN CAREER?

Today, more than ever, organizations are lean and flat, the breadth of a manager's responsibility is greater, expectations are often unclear, manager spans of control are much greater and leadership training budgets are being cut. Most bosses have little time to sit down and learn about your career goals, or to develop and carry out specific leadership development programs that will enhance your leadership competence.

The result: In this complex business climate, it may be very difficult for you to depend on your boss to create a personalized development plan that will enhance your current leadership competence, prepare you to take on more responsibilities, or be your advocate for advancement opportunities when they become available. It may be up to you to take the lead in charting our own future rather than relying on someone else to do it for you.

The question is how?

A recent Stanford research publication reported that women want leadership skills training and/or a coach, to help them improve their leadership effectiveness, yet very few receive the support they need. Without question, it is a daunting task to take ownership of your own professional growth without a coach or a process to guide you. ***That is why many women leaders - executives, middle managers, first level or emerging leaders or women business owners, are utilizing their organization's continuous education benefit programs to purchase personalized leadership development and coaching services as a way of taking personal ownership of their own leadership growth and development.***

What criteria should you use to determine which is best for your personal needs?

There are numerous options for women leaders - programs offered by your own organization, through colleges and universities, consulting firms and even individual leadership coaches are all options that are available. However, when evaluating these options, use the following information to evaluate any program, instructor or coach under consideration:

1. First, clarify your leadership development needs by defining the program and/or coach expectations – define success
2. Second, use the following seven step evaluation to evaluate any program, instructor or coach under consideration.
3. Third, leadership development is an on - going learning process, not an event. It requires a commitment to life time learning both professionally and personally.

STEP #1 – CLARIFY YOUR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT NEEDS BY DEFINING THE PROGRAM AND/OR COACH EXPECTATIONS – DEFINE SUCCESS

Before making any decision about a leadership development program, carefully reflect on what your expectations are, then establish and prioritize the improvement goals you want to achieve over a period of one year. For example you may want to learn how to:

- Enhance your effectiveness as a leader
- Heighten the performance of a direct report – prepare the person to assume greater responsibilities
- Create your own leadership style or “brand” that is unique to you
- Prepare yourself to personally take on more responsibilities and/or for a promotion
- Grow from a tactical to a strategic leader
- Better communicate your ideas in a male [or female] dominated leadership team
- Navigate difficult or complex relationships with direct reports, peers or your boss
- Resolve issues you face such as work – life balance and its impact on your career.
- Establish base line data that quantifies your improvement as a leader
- Determine how you are perceived as a leader by your boss, direct report, peers, a board of directors, your customers, other stakeholders

Establishing priorities is not only critical to your overall coaching success, but it is essential in clarifying your objectives to your boss, who may have to approve your continuing education investment.

1. UNDERSTAND THE UNIQUE ADVANTAGES OF WOMEN - FOCUSED LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Is leadership training and coaching different for women than men? There is no one formula for being an effective leader, regardless of gender. However, men and women are equally capable of effective leadership but are strikingly different in how they promote their strengths and talents. Any program you select should be designed exclusively to meet the challenges and the unique needs you face as a woman leader.

2. METRICS

Establishing goals is the first step, but measuring your progress in achieving those goals is equally important. Any worthwhile leadership development process is more than just a “feel good” experience or a “soft cost” investment. The outcome should be quantifiable to allow you to justify to yourself, and to others, that the effort you have put into this program with your coach, has resulted in enhancing your leadership capabilities, as measured by contributions you make and the influence you wield within the organization, The outcome is dependent on the goals you have set for yourself as well as some of the base line data about your current leadership effectiveness that has been measured or observed. Your progress is then measured against the goals and data after a certain period of time [usually one year]. The resulting comparisons allow you to determine if you have received a good return on your investment as well as a good return on the organization’s continuing education investment.

STEP #2: TAKE OWNERSHIP OF YOUR CAREER

A Seven Step Evaluation Of Any Program, Instructor Or Coach

Any leadership development program you consider - whether it is in-house, from a vendor, a consulting firm, or a college/university, -should have a clearly defined process that is both appropriate to your needs, and aligned to the goals you set for your personal leadership development.

A successful leadership development process should include seven steps:

1. Competency of the Executive Coach
2. Alignment with your professional and personal goals
3. Identification of your current leadership skills
4. Your uniqueness as a woman leader – what differentiates you from your male or female counterparts – your “brand”
5. How others perceive you as a leader
6. A leadership improvement action plan
7. Metrics that measure leadership improvement

1. Successful Leadership Development Requires A Competent Coach: Even if you are already a successful leader, it is a daunting undertaking to try and enhance your leadership competencies on your own. The least effective leadership development programs are those that are referred to as “event” training – usually one or two- day programs conducted in house, by vendors or by college instructors who “train” you. Even if there is some role play in these sessions, most fail, or have limited success because there is little or no on the job follow up and coaching to reinforce and enhance the newly learned skills.

The most effective programs are conducted by a coach who not only conducts the classroom training but also assists in goal setting, observation, feedback and measurement of your progress, both short and longer term, until excellence is achieved. ***Carefully evaluate the coach who is going to work with you on your journey to leadership excellence.*** Make certain that you are comfortable that the coach is a great teacher – who will be a confidential and trusted advisor, is knowledgeable about women leadership issues, who has appropriate business acumen, who will be a sounding board to express ideas, but, is also a person who will not be afraid to challenge your assumptions.

2. Successful Leadership Development Requires Clarity About Your Professional and Personal Career Goals

Every leadership development program begins with the Coach working with the leader, regardless of one’s level of responsibility, to articulate how she is being evaluated as a leader, as well as her business, professional and career goals.

This is an important step in managing one's own career and determining where you want to be professionally as a leader [take on more responsibility, advance, be cross functionally trained, etc.]. This step is also critical in identifying the things you need to be happy and successful in a leadership role. In addition, this step identifies what you need to do to achieve these goals, and how the achievement of these goals may be impacted by what is going on in your personal life. To understand this you will need clarity about your:

- Business Goals
- Career Goals
- Personal Work Life Balance Goals
- Leadership Skill Improvement Goals

In addition to self-assessment exercises and inventories, the Coach will usually utilize one or more leadership assessment tools to help you gain greater insights to these questions.

3. Successful Leadership Development Requires Clarity About All of Your Current Leadership Skills

Even the most competent woman leader sometimes needs to step away and gain clarity about her leadership effectiveness in a safe and supportive environment. Sometimes this can be done without a formal process, but most often this is accomplished in collaboration with a leadership development coach who provides a number of self – assessment exercises, as well as leadership assessment tools that will help you further clarify your leadership skills.

There will be times in your career when you will have a discussion with your boss or some other advocate in the organization about your career goals and your leadership capabilities – and what sets you apart from other leaders in the organization. As part of taking ownership of your career, it is your responsibility to use these discussions to articulate those contributions you and your team are making to the organization, *including all of your leadership competencies which may include:*

- Current leadership skills and interests
- Transferrable leadership skills
- Personal qualities or those personality traits that make it possible for you to excel at what you do

This information will help you identify those leadership skills you may want to focus on when you establish your leadership development action plan.

4. Successful Leadership Development Requires Clarity About Your Uniqueness As A Woman Leader – What Differentiates You From Your Male Or Female Counterparts – Your “brand”

Gone are the days that employees are “tapped on the shoulder” for promotion simply by showing up to work and not making waves. Organizations want a successful, confident, solutions-oriented team contributor who is poised for promotion. Despite the fact that most women leaders understand the importance of self-promotion for their advancement, many have been conditioned to take the back seat and wait to be recognized. Some believe self-promotion is “bragging” and self-serving, and therefore distasteful. For many women leaders, it is a social, cultural and familial thing that prevents them from talking about their accomplishments. Conversely, some women leaders understand the importance of self – promotion but do not know how to do it well – or even worse, do it badly.

The good news is that women leaders are often successful because they bring a unique set of skills to an organization that most men do not possess. Their skills package includes being collaborative, good listeners, participatory, intuitive, empathetic, curious and respectful. The challenge is that historically women leaders have had very few role models to emulate and, as a result, have sometimes tried to be “one of the boys” as a leader. A process focused on the uniqueness of women leaders will put a spotlight on those leadership traits, and help the participants *own them and showcase them as a part of the unique “leadership brand” of females.*

One of the challenges that many women leaders have had to overcome is finding appropriate ways to let others know what they and their teams have contributed to the organization. The inability to let the organization know your contributions can be career limiting. The good news is that there are ways to “toot your horn” that are both appropriate and successful. Your Coach will help you articulate your contributions as you work together to develop your own “leadership brand”.

5. Successful Leadership Development Requires Clarity About How Others Perceive You As A Leader?

While it is important to understand how you and your boss evaluate your leadership effectiveness, it is equally important to understand how your direct reports, your peers, top management, a Board of Directors, customers or other stakeholders perceive you as a leader because these collective perceptions about you can make or break your career.

Perception is reality. While you may see yourself as an effective leader, others who work with you and for you may have a different perception. Understanding yourself through the lens of others is imperative. Embracing your strengths and appreciating others’ perceptions of you are essential to becoming a great leader. Possessing a keen sense of self will help you become an authentic leader and provide insights about what makes you stand out to others. **5**

Many organizations utilize one of several 360 assessments to generate this information but these instruments have shortcomings. There are other better “best practices” tools, used by executive coaches to identify issues or ‘gaps’ that impede one’s growth as an effective leader. This information also provides you with base line data about where you are as a leader today. For example, using a scale of 0 to 100, you can assess where you rank among other leaders. This base line information is essential when establishing a leadership continuous improvement action plan that is designed to help you become a more effective leader. At the end of one year, you can then conduct a second assessment, using this same tool, which will allow you to quantify your improvement as a leader that year. Your Coach should have access to these tools and demonstrate how they are used in leadership development.

6. Successful Leadership Development Requires A Leadership Improvement Action Plan

The previous five steps have prepared you and your Coach with the information you need to develop a leadership improvement action plan which includes your goals, a timetable to achieve those goals, additional training, and individual coaching sessions that are all designed to begin to enhance your leadership effectiveness. Training alone cannot offer this level of follow up.

A sports analogy may be helpful in demonstrating the importance of a formalized leadership development process which includes a qualified Coach. If a star athlete joins a team and then is handed a playbook and left on her own to perform in competition, what would be the normal outcome? If the coach does not show up for the game, or coach the athlete to help them enhance the skills she learned in the class, what chance does this athlete have to become a great player? If this learning concept is important in sports, it is equally, if not more so important, when you are developing your leadership skills. After training, individual coaching sessions should be scheduled every two weeks for the first couple of months and then about once a month there after. It is also recommended you share this action plan with the person to whom you report to get his/her input and buy in. In some situations, their support and mentoring will be critical to your success.

7. Successful Leadership Development Requires Metrics That Measure Leadership Improvement

Every organization evaluates the return they get on their sales, IT or plant or equipment investments. The same scrutiny should be applied to your investment in leadership development.

Any successful leadership action plan must include benchmarks to review the progress you are making as well as the contributions you and your team are making to the organization as a result of your leadership growth. You want to hold both yourself and your Coach accountable

for the achievement of your leadership development goals. By establishing quarterly reviews to focus exclusively on where you are to goal and what action plan steps need to be calibrated going forward is essential to your leadership development success. ***This should be a transformative leadership development experience with quantifiable results.*** You should be prepared to justify the return on the time you are investing and the return on the investment the organization is receiving from their continuing education money.

THE THIRD STEP IN TAKING OWNERSHIP FOR YOUR CAREER

Leadership Development Is A Journey, Not An Event – It Requires A Commitment To Life Time Learning – Professionally and Personally

Doctors, attorneys, accountants all have continuous education requirements to enhance their knowledge and retain their licenses. Professional athletes all have coaches. Even the most successful women leaders report they had good teachers and coaches that helped them get to their current level of competence. Regardless of the profession, these achievers, understand the need to work hard, be studious and participate in life time learning if they are going to move from good - to better - to great - to excellence in their profession. Achievers understand the value of continuing education and the return they get from their investment. They also understand the importance of either studying under someone who is a subject matter expert or aligning themselves with a coach who will help them enhance their competence in order to reach their highest potential. ***As in any profession or in sports, taking ownership for your career by investing in your continuous education is essential to your professional and personal growth as a leader.***

At the end of each anniversary date of your leadership development program, you and your coach should evaluate at least three things:

1. The goals you established at the beginning of the program and quantifying the successes you have achieved.
2. A comparison of your leadership scores to those of other leaders, will show what progress you have made against those leaders.
3. A review of your improvements through the lens of how others in the organization perceive you as a leader.

What do you do with this information?

First and foremost, have you grown as a leader? If you have grown as a leader, what have you learned and how can you use this information to establish new “success goals” and an updated leadership improvement plan for the next year. Today’s work environment demands continual improvement as a leader which, in turn, requires you to calibrate your goals based on the current needs of the organization as well as your own professional and personal goals. This is

also a good opportunity to discuss your expectations of your coach to help ensure the achievement of your goals.

This presents a two-fold opportunity. First, it affords you the chance to discuss your expectations of your Coach to ensure the achievement of your goals. And it also provides an opportunity to use appropriate information from your meetings with your coach to review your progress with your boss or other advocates in your organization. This discussion will help justify to them, the value you have received from your investment of time, as well as the investment of continuous education money provided by the organization.

Take Ownership Of Your Career – Programs Available

For information about six coaching women leadership to excellence programs and three leadership assessments exclusively for women leaders access the Center For Leadership Excellence Website <http://www.cciindy.com/index.php/our-services/coaching-women-to-leadership-excellence>

About The Author: Richard Butz is Co-Founder of The Center For Leadership Excellence and the co- author of six Coaching Women To Leadership Excellence programs and three Women Leadership Assessments. His bio can be seen on their web site www.cciindy.com



The Center for Leadership Excellence

32 East Washington Street, Suite 900, Indianapolis, Indiana 46204