

Helping New Leaders Build Experience and Thrive

Description

The past three years have brought significant changes to organizations in both leadership and the workforce. First, there is the natural retirement of many leaders in the Baby Boomer range. But also, there have been some who chose to retire earlier than planned due to the pandemic or because of their own illness, family needs, exhaustion, or other factors. All these departures mean many positions in leadership are filled with people with less experience than is normal.

Organizations most often promote from within when someone leaves. Even if there is an outside search, a person already in the organization is typically put into a new role on an interim basis. This pattern leads to a cascade of what I call â??one-upâ?• change. By this, I mean people move to a new position sooner than usual due to more departures in the organization. The person who is a good hourly worker moves into the manager/supervisor role. Why? Their manager/supervisor has moved into a director role. Why? The director they are replacing has moved into a vice president role. Why? A vice president or equivalent title has moved into a CEO or administrator role. Thus, one move leads to several other moves, or â??one-upâ?• changes.

This trend has become more apparent to me as I have traveled a great deal the past several months and met so many people in new positions. It is not unusual to find that more than 20 percent of managers/supervisors have been promoted to their position within the last three years. Thus, this is the first time they have done many tasks, such as budgeting, scheduling, hiring, ordering, performance feedback, etc. There is so much to learn and so little time to learn it.

I am usually conducting workshops, presenting to people in management roles. After I ask, â??How many are not new to management, but *are* in a new position?â?• it is no shock to see up to 30 percent of the hands go up. When this is added to the 20 percent mentioned earlier, youâ??ll see there is a total of 50 percent of leaders who are â??newâ?• in some wayâ??either completely new to management or new to their current job. Thatâ??s a lot of leaders in different roles from the ones they held three years ago. Each change is different.

The â??one-upâ?• trend means we have many passionate individuals, with good track records and solid skills, with the potential to be even better once they have more experience and training. However,

it takes time. And in some instances, an organizationâ??s financial situation means sustainable results need to happen quickly. Being in a new leadership role would be very difficult in normal times, and these past three years have not been â??normal.â?• (â??Normalâ?• as we knew it most likely will not exist again.) In addition, these individuals took on the new role at a time when skill development was paused. When I am at a skill development event, it is very normal for the CEO to say, â??This is the first â??in-personâ?? session we have had in over two years.â?• Plus, operating in a virtual environment means informal learning from peers has also been decreased.

My suggestions are:

1. Take time to assess those in a supervisory role of any type, including the C-suite. How long has each person been in their current role?
2. Coach each person on what comes with the role. Do not assume the person knows. What I have found is that people in the new role donâ??t understand the role as well as may be assumed.
3. Create a quadrant with â??willâ?• on the vertical line and â??skillâ?• on the horizontal line. Place the people you lead on the quadrant. Most will be higher in will than skill.
4. Assess each leader individually. People new to leadership are already overwhelmed; to jam lots of development at them, while well intentioned, will only cause the person to feel worse. They may quit or at least want to quit.
5. Individualize skill development based on the role, the needed outcomes, and the current experience and skill of the person. We call this Precision Leader Developmentâ?¢ or PLD. For more information on PLD, reach out to me at Quint@quintstuder.com.
6. Show empathy for the person in the new role. Scope skill development to what is reasonable at the time. Start with the most pressing need. For example, a leaderâ??s biggest issue may be how to best schedule the staff. Starting here will build confidence, and the personâ??s anxiety will be reduced when they are assured the organization is committed to their development.
7. Skill development of people in leadership is not the job of human resources or organizational development. While these departments can assist with resources, oneâ??s leader is the key to development. In the leadership foundational skills list, talent development is a critical skill for every person in leadership.

Almost all organizations have people new to the organization and new to their role. This is great, as recruitment is critical with so many vacancies. Yet the real key is retention. My last column was on building a sense of belonging, which impacts retention. (Click here to read.) Recognizing a personâ??s newness in a role, showing commitment to their success, and investing in an individual development plan shows the person they are valued.

Letâ??s close with one more tip. I was fortunate to attend a skill development session at TriHealth in Cincinnati. At my table were so many dedicated people. I met Joi Lindlau. A table question was, â??What are you doing to retain talent with onboarding?â?• Joi shared that before the person comes to work on the first day, they receive a note from her with a map, detailed with arrows showing exactly where to park. This is important, because people likely parked in a different area in the interview process. She then shows and describes which entrance to come to and reminds them to have their badge, which they will need to enter. Finally, she meets them at the door.

As I heard this, I was so grateful that I get to learn from so many people. I shared with Joi that I will pass along what she is doing to help new people have less anxiety before and during the first day. Thank you, Joi. Your suggestion will help many new leaders quickly get better at this crucial aspect of

their job.

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