

The "Right" Approach to Running an Organization

In my last edition of leadership we dealt with selection of leadership style, based on individual and organizational variables. Another way to look at leadership is to consider how it is used. We will now explore the leader's selection of the "right" approach to running an organization.

One way to deal with approaches to leadership is to consider builders and fixers.

Builders develop their teams or businesses to perform successfully. They are leaders that have long term vision. They build for the future. They are strategic thinkers. They foster understanding and commitment to their subordinates. They train others to work and to lead. Builders say "I may be achieving the results but I need to make sure my folks understand and use all the available tools and skills to continue success.. My people must be prepared to face changing market conditions and to move on to places where those skills will be needed."

Workers from builders' teams and companies can move to any market and easily adapt. They have been required to use and learn all the basics-even if they weren't critical to success at the time. As new leaders they will be able to teach the basic skills to their subordinates.

The performance curves of builders' teams and companies show gradual, but generally steady improvement. Their efforts sustain success because their approach breeds subordinates who are capable and committed to perform, even in the absence of their leaders. Builders are mentors and the stabilizing influences on their teams or companies. They mold their companies and teams for success and when they move on they leave productive individuals that can maintain the momentum.

Fixers come into companies at a dead run and have an immediate impact on performance. Fixers don't lead. They push. They are short-sighted. They are tacticians. They work in the near term. They run their companies on the strength of their authority. They make people produce and perform without developing the understanding and commitment that builds for the future.

Fixers say, "I'm being successful now. That's what's important. Don't bother me with unimportant details."

Workers and subordinate leaders from fixer companies have trouble adapting to changing conditions in the market. They have to relearn how to make it in a tougher and forever changing market environment. The problems is compounded when the worker themselves become leaders. They suffer from the inability to teach and adapt.

The performance curves of fixers' companies have a fast rise-time. Their results may be sustainable, however, because they are based on the presence of the fixer as the driving force. Fixers uses their people; they produce results; they make a name for themselves and then they leave. You have seen so many of them in corporate level executives. When a company needs an immediate impact they hire a fixer. When the fixer leaves the organization usually stops producing. When they leave the organization breathes a sigh of relief.

Builders sometimes use fixer tactics in approaching the task at hand. They know that all organizations need to be energized occasionally. A builder knows when to stop the fixer does not. A builder knows when to change his approach. A fixer either doesn't know when to change or can't adapt to the need for change.

As a senior leader you must remember that the operative phase is "build for the future" not "fix" for the future.

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