

May/June/July 2007

AASPA
BEST PRACTICES
IN SCHOOL PERSONNEL

American Association of School Personnel Administrators

LEADERSHIP
in the
21ST CENTURY

360 Degrees Of Leadership Development



Tom Nugent,
Managing Partner, LeadersInEdu,
Grosse Pointe Farms, MI

"The Leaders are the Ones the People Choose to Follow."

Unidentified Indonesian Chieftain

Understanding the 360 process

An effective tactic to grow leaders and leadership skills includes the use of 360 feedback to help leaders identify and focus on developmental priorities. Key stakeholders including the leader's superiors, co-workers and direct reports give feedback on a broad range of leadership, interpersonal and technical skills using instruments that are targeted to the leader's key competencies.

360 feedback provides leaders with a challenge to compare their self perspective with the perception of their important stakeholder groups. When used to identify growth goals, and in accordance with the Best Practices published in 2002 by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), leaders can improve their performance, relate more effectively, and have an impact on changing organizational culture.

Outcomes

The desired outcome is for a leader to focus his or her growth on meaningful behaviors and skills. The data provided by a 360 instrument is only a jumping off point for that development process. Leaders who grow from 360 are usually those who recognize the meanings behind the messages, and who model new behaviors in the very process of responding to their feedback. It is essential that leaders hold conversations to clarify the feedback, decide upon and declare their growth goals and set an agenda for follow up.

Marshall Goldsmith, a well known behavioral coach who works with senior corporate executives, has opened up his tools and resources for others to use to transform leaders. His short video *Responding to 360 Feedback* at http://www.marshallgoldsmithlibrary.com/cim/video_Athena.php# is worth the work of typing into a browser window, but readers should guard against the distraction of 30 other videos on the page, all engaging and worth sharing with others. All of Marshall's work allows free access and is a terrific resource for developing leaders.

Leaders who respond to feedback by accepting recognition for their strengths, committing to improve their interactions, and developing a process to check themselves as they move forward, have a strong advantage in the culture-changing skill of building trust.

Instruments and tools

CCL is just one of the organizations that provides an array of 360 tools. Some allow for complete customization. Others are tailored to models that have proven effective in multiple organizational environments. CCL's 360's have stood up to testing and can be researched for both reliability and validity. At the other end of the scale, Snapesolutions.com will put together a complete 360 program using the client's list of questions, which can be specifically targeted to the organization's values, competencies and performance

criteria. What it lacks in psychometrics it makes up for in targeting and immediacy, if put together by an HR manager with expertise in both testing and leadership development.

In working with school leadership teams in southeast Michigan, the *Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)* based on the Kouzes and Posner book *The Leadership Challenge* has proven effective. Wiley owns the rights, a company already familiar to educational leaders. The assessment is simple, using only 30 questions divided among six leadership practices, and it can be administered simply and easily through an online website at www.lpionline.com.

Groups or individuals

360 feedback results can be administered in group sessions or in multiple individual coaching sessions. Peer group sessions have the advantage of speed, and the opportunity for participants to share, to commiserate, to reinforce feedback directly in one another, and to strategize together about the culture and the goals of the organization. Peer sessions have a weakness in that participants can easily leave the day's work behind in the workshop and resume their jobs without commitment to growth. Many 360 instruments have extensive resources for conducting sessions.

Multiple individual coaching sessions have the advantage of clarity, confidentiality, and individual insight from someone experienced in coaching for development. Coaches can be effective at helping leaders link the abstraction of the feedback data to the real life, real time

behavior that the leader needs to develop. Individual coaching has a weakness in that few organizations in business or education are prepared to supply effective internal coaches, and external coaching implies a cost beyond simply materials and time. A compromise that can be effective is to use an external coach as a resource to an internal administrator, leveraging the coach's technical skills and relying on the internal administrator's follow through and cultural expertise.

How 360 fits in a development overview

360 feedback is a development tool that has high value for individuals who want to improve their skills and for school districts that need to accelerate their leadership development system. It's not for the faint of heart. Once a leader or a group of leaders commit to listening through a 360 process, their integrity is on the line. If they implement the program and do not change stakeholder's perceptions, they would be better to have never begun the process.

Still, 360 feedback is just one tool in developing leaders who can lead performance and change culture. Leaders who focus on self development often find they function within a team (or group) framework that does not harness the skills and energies of all the participants. A focus on self development can lead to a focus on developing the team so that individual leaders feel they are utilizing the best of their own strengths, and leveraging the skills of the entire team.

Teams often define themselves by determining a vision for the organization, structuring the

continued...



360 Degrees Of Leadership Development

continued from page 11

leadership role of the team, and identifying their individual roles and contributions, in that order. Starting by focusing on the abstraction of a vision does not follow how people approach life. An organizational model that starts with a focus on the entire organization, or on the team, ignores the fact that people develop commitment based on their individual values.

Our economic model, capitalism, and our governmental model, democracy, both assume that people start with their self-interest in mind. Changing organizations and cultures, if following the same value system, will first focus people on individual development, the thing in which they place the greatest value.

Self development (achieving my “self” vision) drives commitment to team development (achieving the “team’s” vision) which drives commitment to organizational development (achieving the “organization’s” vision). As Robert Quinn defines it in *Deep Change*, to lead culture change, start by changing yourself.

Startup Checklist

Using 360 to develop leaders, improve performance and change culture starts with a few simple but important steps:

1. Decide at the start on the outcomes desired. It is relatively easy to implement a program that looks meaningful but produces no change and no growth.
2. Determine to start at the top. Initiatives like 360 feedback that require some level of vulnerability are seldom successful if the top tier of leaders exempts itself.
3. Separate development from performance. While an effective leadership development program should drive performance, using 360 feedback to **measure** performance is unfair and ineffective. If a clear, effective performance evaluation program is not in place, 360 feedback will only confuse and intimidate.
4. Simplify, Simplify, Simplify. If the leader finishes the program with a single sticky note on his or her computer screen with one or two things to do every day, there is a good chance for growth.
5. Have leaders declare their goal and set up a system to check their progress. Organizations spend millions on training every year and pennies on follow up.

The author can be reached at coach@leadersinedu.com.