

Leadership Coaching: Accelerating the Impact of Leaders



by Tom Wiltzius, PhD, with Bellin Health President & CEO George Kerwin, Bassett Mechanical President & CEO Kim Bassett-Heitzmann, and Green Bay Packers Vice President of Organizational/Staff Development Betsy Mitchell.

Published research by numerous consulting firms suggests that more than two-thirds of organizations do not fully capture performance opportunities reflected in their strategic plans.

Where do the breakdowns occur?

There are four absolutes for sustained success according to researcher and author, William Joyce (*What Really Works*, 2004). According to Joyce:

- An organization first must have a vision with clearly stated and focused strategies;
- Second, leaders and their teams must execute the strategy flawlessly;
- Third, the organizational culture must be performance-oriented; and
- Finally, the organization must have a structure that is relevant -- fast, flexible, and flat.

Consultants Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan (*Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done*, 2002 and 2010) provide example after example of organizations where leaders see their future clearly, develop appropriate strategic plans, then fail to execute the plans. The results are often fatal.

Again, where can things go wrong? How can so much leadership knowledge, experience, and drive result in outcomes that fall short?

Ultimately, “falling short” is typically about leaders who are less than effective in executing key responsibilities. And it is important to note that these leaders are rarely slackers. Indeed, they almost always are very knowledgeable, driven, ethical and well-intended.

Most leaders can create a great vision and relevant strategic plan, and each leader can make a personal commitment to the plan. Trouble follows, though, when leaders go back to their offices to do the same things, the same way, at the same pace, and with the same focus that they have in the past.

Individually, leaders have personal accountability for organizational functions such as marketing, finance, operations or human resources. However, and especially at the executive level, these leaders often forsake leading the enterprise and remain deeply immersed in their own little functional “sandbox.” When leaders immerse themselves too deeply in their own functional are, they make a mistake that often leads to missed enterprise-level goals. This happens because they – by focusing primarily on their “own” part of the organization -- fail to fully leverage or collaborate with others in order to execute strategies.

And this is where leadership coaching comes in.

Experts who study sustained organizational success clearly indicate that effective leaders must:

- Align both conceptually and operationally;
- Collaborate and adhere to the organization's strategic imperatives; and
- Assume shared responsibility for creating and sustaining a culture that will support the strategic plans and value proposition of the enterprise.

These behavioral dynamics are where effective executive coaching should focus. Several Northeast Wisconsin-based executives who are proficient in understanding and using coaching in their respective organizations offer some insights.

These executives are leading the charge towards new visions for their respective organizations. These organizations are already highly respected and accomplished, and have attracted and retained leaders at the executive and management levels. And each organization has used coaching to assist their high-performing leaders to become even more effective.

Create a new vision for your organization and you create new opportunities and challenges... inspirational opportunities and aspirational challenges for leaders at every level.

Bellin Health

Bellin Health is regarded as one of the foremost healthcare systems in the United States, according to the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI). Even though it is smaller than some other premier health systems like Cincinnati Children's Hospital and Kaiser-Permanente, it is clearly recognized as highly innovative and effective. George Kerwin, Bellin's President and CEO, has attracted and developed top leaders, and invests in their effectiveness through multiple forms of leadership development, including executive coaching.

According to Kerwin, organizations delivering health-related services are very complex, and are led by individuals with diverse technical backgrounds and personalities.

"Bellin has used formal organizational development tools to ensure that members of our leadership team understand the unique abilities each person brings to the team. Harnessing team diversity strengthens Bellin's ability to effectively execute our strategies," states Kerwin. "As new team members join the leadership group, individual coaching helps the new person understand our culture of mutual respect."

"Within our culture, each team member confidently takes on individual accountability for executing our strategies. Through use of Bellin organizational development techniques and individual coaching," emphasizes Kerwin, "team energy otherwise wasted on misunderstanding and distrust can be channeled toward accomplishing Bellin's mission of improving the health of our population."

Bassett Mechanical

Bassett Mechanical was a recent recipient of the Wisconsin Manufacturer of the Year Award. Specializing in mechanical contracting, mechanical maintenance services and custom metals manufacturing, Bassett is a 75-year-old family-owned firm that draws its skilled employees through local union halls. Three years ago Kim Bassett-Heitzmann had been named President and COO, and just recently was named CEO. One of her first initiatives was to endorse and lead an initiative to strengthen Bassett's leadership team via coaching interventions.

"Leadership starts with self-awareness," says Bassett-Heitzmann. "Only then can the journey of building on one's strengths and weaknesses begin."

"We started with concurrent coaching of both individual executives, as well as of the collective leadership team. Everyone has been committed to growing and developing. It hasn't always been easy, but it has definitely been worthwhile."

Green Bay Packers

The Green Bay Packers have already demonstrated the effectiveness of aligning toward a common goal of winning. And like many organizations that recruit top talent, work in a competitive environment, and rely on leadership to contribute effectively, the Packers know that sustaining success means maintaining the right formula for success.

Betsy Mitchell, Vice President of Organizational/Staff Development, reflected on the multi-faceted aspects of the Packer success formula.

"We have created a culture of success and collaboration, with a common goal of winning, and with clear expectations of individual behavior on and off the field for every member of the Packer organization."

"It is about alignment, mutual respect, commitment to team members and teamwork, mutual support and shared vision of success. We commit heavily to every member of the organization, whether player, coach, executive or staff. We are one team and we all wear a 'G' wherever we go."

"The 'G' represents the values we live with passion. Each of us is responsible to ourselves and to one another. We recruit, train, coach and develop each other and as an organization."

"The Packers have five core enterprise objectives. Each individual role has responsibilities that align to those objectives. We have built and work to sustain a culture of success...a culture of values."

Mitchell indicates that it all begins with coaching and leading one's self, citing the work of John Maxwell (*Developing the Leader Within You*, 2005).

Conclusion

Effective coaching is an aid to leaders in addressing these essential behaviors. Today, most executives see coaching subordinates as a principle responsibility, yet organizations also rely often on outside professional coaches. (See *The Art and Practice of Leadership Coaching*, 2005). Qualifications of Leadership Coaches vary widely and so do their orientations. While some coaches focus on success behaviors, other coaches also address behaviors that can have the potential to derail a leader's efforts. (See *Why CEOs Fail*, 2003).

Bossidy and Charan insist there are *Seven Essential Behaviors* that leaders must engage in to optimize their own effectiveness as leaders and the performance of those they lead.

- Know your people and your business.
- Insist on realism.
- Set clear goals and priorities.
- Follow through.
- Reward doers.
- Expand people's capabilities.
- Know yourself.

Qualified professional coaches are often former business leaders themselves who may meet specific coaching qualifications through combinations of education and certification or licensure, coupled to business leadership experience. Many coaches are also licensed to integrate refined leadership assessment tools like the *Hogan Leadership Suite* into their coaching services. These coaches support corporate executives in meeting their organization's performance objectives through their expertise.

With three highly successful organizations in Northeast Wisconsin, there appears to be a recognizable pattern of creating a shared vision, leadership alignment, and full organizational commitment towards a common goal of success. Recognizing that individual skills are not enough, these organizations commit to using coaching with both internal and external executive coaches, in order to attain and sustain success.