



LEADING AT THE EDGE

Or how to unlock extraordinary performance

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Cutting edge leaders know how to take appropriate risk, inspire trust and create opportunities to foster success for themselves and their teams. Being appointed a leader, however, does not necessarily make you one. The good news is that high performance leadership and leading at the edge are talents everyone can learn.

What does it take to lead at the edge?

Leading at the edge requires an artful mix of focus, motivation, inspiration and courage to take risks that constantly push the boundaries. In order to reap the benefits of leading at the edge, eight paths need to become an integral part of both personal style and organizational culture:

1. Develop your leadership talent

Companies that have a leadership development culture excel because they become talent magnets by consistently providing people with opportunities to learn, grow and build leadership competencies. As with all talents, leadership must be developed through years of focused learning, training and practice. Leadership requires resilience, the ability to learn from both adversity and failure, to constantly seek feedback and to refine one's own skills.

2. Lead from the mind's eye

Learning how to master the mind's eye enables one to make choices about how one thinks, feels and acts in any given moment. The brain can be trained to look for opportunities and to go beyond obstacles, just as great athletes, musicians and actors do. Leaders who learn how to program their bodies and emotions to follow their mind will always outperform others, and personal leadership competence is a result of being aware of and regulating one's mental states and emotions. Current brain research has significantly advanced the understanding of how the brain works to allow high performing leaders to be – and stay – on the cutting edge. By understanding how the brain is wired, we can learn to rewire it and create the conditions that enable us to become truly high performing leaders.

3. Build success through your secure base relationships

A secure base is someone who provides a sense of protection, is a source of positive inspiration and provides comfort in times of stress, frustration or failure. While everyone needs to be their own secure base in order to feel self-confident, we never outgrow the need for external secure bases. Very talented people often fail because they either lack secure bases or choose the wrong ones. Having the support of secure bases makes the attainment of seemingly unreachable goals possible simply because they believe in you more than you believe in yourself. Either way, positive self-esteem expands.

4. Lead through effective communications

A hallmark of high performance leaders is the ability to influence others through all levels and types of communication, from simple interactions to difficult conversations and more complex conflicts, in order to achieve greater team and organizational alignment. High performing leaders are able to unite diverse team members by building common goals and even shared emotions by engaging in powerful and effective dialogue.

5. Leading through conflict management

Changing negative conflicts into positive engagement is crucial for organizations to perform well. High performing leaders are able to deal with disputes, disagreements and diverse points of view about strategy and implementation to create energy, bring about change, stimulate creativity and help form strongly bonded teams in full alignment. Organizations that encourage people to raise difficult issues find that doing so leads to innovation, new goals and the changes needed to achieve them.

6. Leading in a fragmented world

Among the many challenges that leaders confront in the 21st century, fragmentation in executive teams and their organizations is often cited as a major barrier to execution and implementation. Efforts to create shared goals and visions are undermined by diverse cultures and global dispersion as well as shifting patterns of knowledge and expertise. Leaders can define and address the dilemma of conflict and consensus that often leads to

fragmentation, and learn to develop and build integrated groups and teams across global organizations, creating an organization with “enough” shared purpose and direction to make change happen.

7. Leading through strategy

What are the requirements for sustainable success in increasingly volatile and uncertain markets? Leaders face many conflicting goals, and need to explore what it means to have a strategy in the current business environment. This includes understanding both the strategic role of the leadership team within the organization and the challenges of the overall strategy process on individual leaders. By visualizing alternative futures, leaders are able to clarify potential directions and options as a basis for enabling leadership choice.

8. Leading at the edge is a journey

High performing leaders know that learning to lead at the edge is a lifetime process of discovery. By playing to win, rather than playing not to lose, leaders make work a more exciting, enjoyable and engaging place for themselves and all those around them. With this foundation, running the business, and implementing strategy will be much more successful.

Professor George Kohlrieser teaches on the High Performance Leadership, Leading the Family Business and the Orchestrating Winning Performance programs.

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