

GREAT LEADERS

...need great feedback



We are privileged to work with many excellent leaders. In that work we have observed that the most effective leaders are constantly learning about their business. They measure and review key indicators to understand what is happening *in* the business, what is happening *to* the business, and why. They base their choices about what to do on what they learn.

Yet while they learn about their business, many of these same leaders do not learn about their own leadership...

- Are they currently performing at a high level as a leader in the eyes of those they lead and others who have an interest in their work?
- Is their behaviour consistent with the vision, mission, values and expectations of the organization?
- Do they have the skills and characteristics needed to succeed in a future that may present new and quite different challenges?

These leaders operate in feedback- poor environments with respect to their leadership. They don't know how well they are doing or what might need to change. They often miss or misjudge threats and opportunities.

This is a problem for individual leaders. In their haste to go faster, they may neglect to invest time in getting smarter. They can become over-confident, or complacent. Success can be falsely reassuring and make it hard to recognize possible weaknesses.

Also, many organizations do not have the culture or the processes for effective leadership feedback. While it is common to hear "we value leadership", rarely do organizations define specifically what is expected of leaders. Performance appraisal systems seldom assess leadership in any meaningful way. And in our flatter, leaner business structures, there may not be anyone in a position to offer the leader the kind of feedback about their leadership they need. When appropriate sources of feedback are identified, the people called upon may not be willing or able to do it well.

Compass Points is a service of Key Consulting Group Inc. and Corporate Compass assessment solutions.

For more information call...
1.888.4KeyInc

Or visit us on the web...
www.KeyInc.com
www.CorporateCompass.com

Compass  **Points**

Leaders need high quality information about how they're doing, and they need to take the initiative to get this data. Organizations can help. Here are some ways to get feedback.

Honest, Thoughtful Self-Reflection - There is no better place for the leader to start looking for feedback than with themselves. We ask leaders to develop a discipline of sitting down daily for 5-10 minutes to record their reflections on the day – what happened, why, what was learned from it about themselves and leadership in general, and how that learning might be applied in the future.

A conversation that begins with a clear request for feedback, a legitimate promise of no reprisals, and skillful listening by the leader is the ideal forum for feedback.

It is useful during these times to reflect on personal values and aspirations - if they don't know where they are going, feedback on how they are getting there will not be as useful.

Direct Feedback From Co-Workers and Others - Seeking direct feedback from others, one on one or in a group, is an important source of feedback. Leaders are defined by their followers – if no one is following, they are not leading. A conversation that begins with a clear request for feedback, a legitimate promise of no reprisals, and skillful listening by the leader is the ideal forum for feedback. And, by opening up to feedback from others, the leader is setting a positive example of direct communication and continuous learning.

360° Assessment - Sometimes direct feedback needs a little help. Leaders often have complicated relationships with their staff and other stakeholders that may interfere with getting the direct, honest feedback they need. It may be necessary to provide a safe distance and a supportive structure for the process.

A 360, or multi-rater, assessment collects the perceptions of others using a shared model or framework. When respondents are offered anonymity and asked specific, focused questions, feedback will likely be more honest.

There are several pre-built leadership 360 tools available (see [Paths to Leadership](#) for one). Alternatively, an organization can define its own assessment framework by articulating specific expectations for leaders and have a custom tool designed.

This approach has a couple of benefits. First, it is a good starting point to educate leaders and others regarding leadership expectations. Second, the framework can include new skills and characteristics the organization believes will be needed from leaders in the future.

The behaviour based questions in the typical 360 assessment are relatively easy to answer from every day observations. Interpretation of the feedback is relatively simple as well: more (or less) of certain behaviours should lead to improvement.

The drawback is that any specific behaviour does not necessarily guarantee the desired result – effective leadership. We need to consider that some leaders might employ unconventional means, yet get good results. And others might do the right things, but not produce the right outcomes.

Outcome Assessments – Rather than ask about the behaviours of effective leaders, an outcome assessment asks what the leader achieves or produces. For example, the typical 360 might question whether the leader “tells the truth”, “keeps promises” and “handles conflict directly” to assess how well the leader builds trust. An outcome assessment might simply ask “Do you trust this leader?” (our Engagement Assessment is an example—ask us for details.).



Outcome based questions require more thought and judgment on the part of respondents. And, the responses may require more interpretation on the part of the leader. When it comes time to turn the feedback into a plan for change, we still must look at behaviour - what will need to be done to create an improved result.

Yet if you want results rather than a particular "style" of leadership, the outcome assessment may be the way to go. Also, because the usual outcome assessment uses fewer questions to get at the same areas, it can be more comprehensive without being overwhelming.

Finally, any form of feedback can be enhanced by surrounding it with effective coaching. A coach is a catalyst for learning, someone who specifically agrees to work with an individual to improve their leadership.

A good coach offers timely, constructive feedback, telling the leader what they need to hear in an honest and direct manner free of the political or personal-gain motives that may influence feedback from others. They also will challenge assumptions and beliefs, insisting the leader commit to specific, measurable learning goals and facilitating development of a learning plan.

An effective coach may or may not have specialized training or experience - sometimes all a leader needs is someone to listen or offer another perspective. The leader's manager can play this role, and is often the right person for the job - they see the leader work, and are expected by the organization to help the leader develop.

In some circumstances though, the boss may not be the best choice due to geography, organizational priorities, a poor relationship with the leader, or a lack of coaching skills. Fortunately, a coach can also be a work peer, a colleague from elsewhere in the business, or even an outsider.

However they go about getting it, leaders, even the best, need feedback. If you are a leader, how will you get the feedback you need? If you believe your organization needs great leaders, how can you help them get more and better feedback than they do now? It seems like these questions get more urgent every day.

Corporate Compass is a division of Key Consulting Group Inc. Since 1987, the partners at Key have consulted to a broad range of clients in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors. Our offices are in Calgary and Edmonton, Alberta, and we have associates across Canada. If you need *Assessments and Surveys*, *Organization Development Consulting*, *Leadership Development* or *Training Design and Delivery*, you can count on us for practical, high impact solutions.

For more information about our products and services, please contact...

Calgary

Suite 20
805—5th Avenue SW
Calgary, Alberta T2P 0N6

Randy Parkin
403.256.6869
randy@keyinc.com

Robert Craddock
403.257.3399
robert@keyinc.com

Edmonton

Suite 100
5104—82nd Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T6B 0E6

Don Beeken
780.423.1896
don@keyinc.com

Across Canada

Toll Free... 1.888.4KeyInc

Or visit us on the web...
www.KeyInc.com
www.CorporateCompass.com



Compass  **Points**