

Real Leadership *Insights*

A Monthly Source of Information for Today's Top HR and Business Leaders

September 2020

This Month's Topic: The Speed of Change in 2020: How Successful Leaders are Thriving

Overview

In recent discussions with [executives from leading companies](#), we found some consistent themes that leaders in organizations are experiencing in 2020. Leaders have had to quickly understand the changing current states of their businesses and respond accordingly. As we heard, some leaders have risen to the occasion and successfully led their teams through adversity to new opportunities, while others have not, and their teams are struggling. We asked, "What are the defining differences in leaders who are excelling and those who are lagging?"

Here is a summary of what they told us about successful leaders are doing now:

1. **Making decisions quickly** – Leader's success is largely measured by the decisions they makes. Now, they must get comfortable making calls with less, but also be hyper-focused on using the right data.
2. **Balancing risks** – Tied to decision-making, leaders are being required to "work in the gray" and take more calculated risks for potential reward. Having open dialogue about what success looks like and understanding the organization's tolerance for failure (learning) are key for leaders.
3. **Communicating fast and often** – Organizations quickly realized the benefits of both the speed and frequency of communication with the broader organization. (See Communicate Clearly--and

Coach's Corner

Real Leadership in Action

One of our coaching clients is a senior leader in an academic medical center. Dr. Stewart (not his real name) is a highly accomplished scientist; however, he has not put a lot of time nor attention into developing his leadership skills and competencies until very recently. **One of his opportunities is to develop and mentor his faculty members.** He was unsure about how to go about this as the academic environment has a unique culture and faculty have different needs than typical employees of other types of organizations. His "mental model" was that he needed to provide the faculty, with answers and, because he is not an expert in every area that his faculty are, he did not feel qualified to provide them with answers or feedback.

As he described how he thought about his role, **we challenged him with a different definition of leadership.** We were able to agree that his job was not to provide them

Often below for some quick tips to improve leadership communication.)

4. **Practicing a [growth mindset](#)** – The ability to understand that you can and should continue to learn, grow, and adapt, is particularly important in a world where technology and knowledge are advancing growing exponentially and no one “expert” can know it all.



Read more in **Coach's Corner** about one of our clients who adapted a growth mindset and transformed himself from an operations manager to a strategic leader.

with the answers, but to coach and guide them. And, maybe even more importantly, was that he asks the right questions that challenge them and encourage creative thinking. This realization allowed Dr. Stewart to **develop a new mental model, or growth mindset, for working with his faculty members.** We outlined a specific structure for him to use to understand how each faculty member defined success, assess where each is against that definition, and craft a plan to bridge any gaps. It was also important to include how Dr. Stewart can support them in achieving success and how he would be providing them feedback in the process. This new approach was the first step in helping Dr. Stewart evolve from an operational manager to an organizational leader. The faculty responded very positively, and they were able to see him as both a coach and a mentor. Dr. Stewart is getting more comfortable with this shift to a growth mindset in his leadership style and is seeing the results in his team.

Communicate Clearly—and Often

George Bernard Shaw said it best in his quotation about communication: “The biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

The numbers are sobering:

- 86% of senior executives, managers, and junior staff at U.S. companies reported experiencing communication breakdowns that led to reduced productivity, missed deadlines, and sales deals that don't close, according to research from [The Economist Intelligence Unit](#).
- 63% of U.S. employees in 2019 who have wanted to quit their jobs because ineffective communication had gotten in the way of doing their work, almost double from 2018 (33 percent), according to a [Dynamic Signal study](#).

So, what can organization and individual leaders do to address these significant gaps? **Communicate clearly and often to reduce the opportunities for frustration, disengagement, and performance challenges.**

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About the Authors

Connect The Dots — CTD — is what real leadership is all about. That's because CTD delivers Leadership Solutions that are crafted for the real world, which means your world, your goals, your staff, your leaders, and your — instead of a thousand other companies' — real life leadership needs.

Whether your immediate leadership challenge is [Onboarding](#) an especially prized new hire, or [Coaching](#) a seasoned, vital executive, or giving a [Team](#) the tools and skills to help them become agents of their own improved productivity, CTD's approach is always the same: Which means it's different for every client.



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