ai ACADEMIC IMPRESSIONS

THE DERAILMENT OF THE LEADER IN HIGHER EDUCATION:

STEPS TO IDENTIFYING AND PREVENTING IT

By **Patrick Sanaghan & Jillian Lohndorf**

HIGHER ED IMPACT

Delivered free to your inbox, *Higher Ed Impact* provides you with a full tool kit to help you monitor and assess the trends and strategic challenges likely to have an impact on your institution's health and competitiveness.

DAILY**PULSE**

Scan current events, timely research, and notable practices at other institutions.
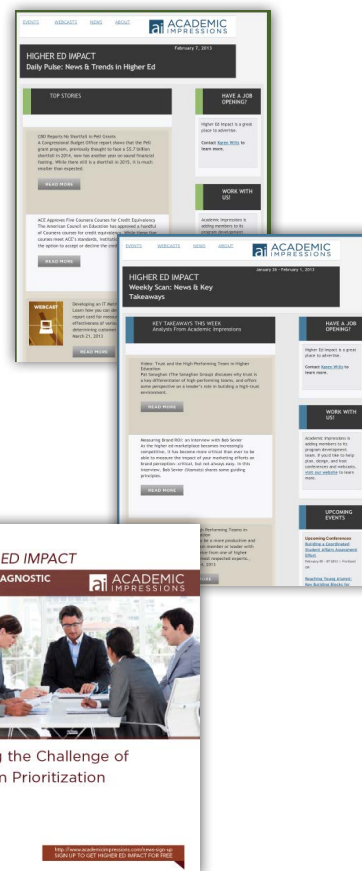
WEEKLY**SCAN**

Review the week's most significant events and the most timely research in higher education, with key takeaways suggested by higher education's leading experts.

DIAGNOSTIC

Get an enterprise-wide and in-depth look at a current, strategic challenge; identify steps to take and critical questions to address.

Learn more or sign up to receive *Higher Ed Impact* at:

http://www.academicimpressions.com/news-sign-up

ABOUT ACADEMIC IMPRESSIONS

We are an organization that exclusively serves higher education professionals. We offer focused and intentionally crafted learning experiences to help you address your most pressing challenges.

Our work addresses a range of issues related to student recruitment and retention, faculty support and development, alumni engagement and development, and increasing organizational productivity.

Learn more at www.academicimpressions.com.

AUTHORS

PATRICK SANAGHAN

PRESIDENT, THE SANAGHAN GROUP

Dr. Sanaghan serves as the head of The Sanaghan Group, an organizational firm specializing in leadership development, executive coaching, strategic planning, and leadership transitions. Pat has worked with over 200 campuses and hundreds of organizations in the last twenty-five years. He has taught leadership to thousands of leaders in higher education, and helped over one hundred campuses conduct collaborative, transparent strategic planning processes.

He is the co-author/author of six books, numerous articles, and several monographs in the fields of strategic planning, leadership, and change management. His most recent books include: *Collaborative Leadership in Action and How to Actually Build an Exceptional Team*.

JILLIAN LOHNDORF

LIBRARIAN, CHICAGO SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
RESEARCH ASSOCIATE, THE SANAGHAN GROUP

Jillian is a Librarian at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, Chicago campus, a graduate school focusing exclusively on psychology and related behavioral sciences, where she supports the Organizational leadership and Business Psychology departments. Since receiving her Masters of Library and Information Science from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Jillian has worked in both corporate archives and higher education. As a research associate at The Sanaghan Group, Jillian also provides background research, content editing and handles all bibliographic work for a variety of publications.

AI EDITORS

AMIT MRIG

PRESIDENT, ACADEMIC IMPRESSIONS

DANIEL FUSCH

DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS, ACADEMIC IMPRESSIONS

ai PRO | ACADEMIC IMPRESSIONS MEMBERSHIP

ACADEMIC IMPRESSIONS MEMBERSHIP

AI Pro is an annual membership that gives you--and your team--access to hundreds of hours of training on the most critical issues facing higher education. Join this community of 200+ institutions!

Visit:

 http://www.academicimpressions.com/ai-pro

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

It is estimated that upwards of 50% of all leaders and managers fail.[1] The costs of leadership derailment are high, especially when this happens to a senior leader;[2] financial costs, as well as the intangibles of the negative impact on organizational culture, morale and effectiveness.[3]

With so much at stake, why is it that so many leaders fail? And why aren't more people talking about it? Derailment seems to live as a taboo topic, discussed beyond closed doors.

While The Center for Creative Leadership (C.C.L.) has been one of the research pioneers in the field of leadership derailment for several decades[4], much of the general current research on derailment focuses on the corporate sector, although derailment is also alive and well in higher education. Just as in the corporate world, leadership derailment in higher education occurs when a "youngish" (30-40 years), high-performing and promising leader unravels and their career becomes undone due to inappropriate and ineffective behaviors. They are either fired outright or demoted, or their career fizzles out slowly as they hit a leadership plateau that they never recover from. The promise and potential hit a wall.

1   Lombardo and Eichenger, 1999; Charan and Colvin, 1999; Charan, 2005; Gentry and Chappelow, 2009; Hogan, Hogan and Kaiser, 2010.
2   Furnham and Taylor, 2010; Wan, 2011; Inang, 2013.
3   Hogan and Hogan, 2001; Hogan, Hogan and Kaiser, 2009.
4   Lombardo & Eichenger, 1989.

The good news is that derailment leaves clues; it doesn't just happen overnight. There are distinct behavioral signs that can predict derailment, even if they are often ignored.[5] Often, it's hoped that the ineffective behaviors will magically disappear or that the leader will simply get better over time, perhaps due to maturity or experience.

However, the reality is that leaders tend to get worse without intervention. While the odds of improvement are small, the opportunity exists.[6]

While the dynamics of presidential derailment[7] are separate and won't be specifically addressed here, derailment can affect the entirety of campus leadership. Avoiding it starts with a conversation among campus leaders to understand the complexities embedded in this leadership dynamic. It involves looking headfirst into the issues and behaviors at the heart of derailment.

---

5   Lombardo and Eichenger, 1999; Hogan, Hogan and Kaiser, 2009.
6   Lombardo and Eichenger, 1989.
7   Presidencies Derailed: Why University Leaders Fail and How to Prevent It (2013).

HOW TO IDENTIFY DERAILMENT

THE MYTHOLOGY OF "HIGH POTENTIALS"

High potential employees or "HI Po's" are a term that human resources and talent management professionals use to describe the top 5% or so of performers who have the talent and skills to move up the career ladder and make a powerful contribution to an organization's success.[8] The corporate sector uses this term rampantly, and has mechanisms in place to develop their skill sets and grow their leadership skills, including job rotations, "stretch" assignments, mentor programs, and high profile leadership programs. They invest resources in Hi-Po's with the hope that it will pay off sometime in the future.

While higher education may not use the same term or processes, Hi-Po's certainly exist on many campuses, and Hi-Po's are especially susceptible to the derailment syndrome. The Hi-Po identification and selection process is very predictable and many of these high potentials look and act the same.[9] It can be described as, "I am not sure what it is, but they just look like leaders to me."

---

8   Ready, Conger &Hill,2010,Hogan,Hogan & Kaiser,2009) Fernandez-Araoz, Graysberg & Nohria, 2011.
9   Ready, Conger & Hill, 2010.

- They have a fair amount of "charisma," which is what gets them noticed

- They are ambitious and make it known. They reach out for assignments, "volunteer" to lead a group, team or task force.

- They are quick on their feet, able to articulately answer questions in the moment. What impresses people is not the quality of the answer, but the speed in which they respond.

- They tend to be attractive physically or they have a physical "presence," which helps them stand out from the crowd.

Hi-Po's also have many positive traits, such as a strong work ethic, persistence, resilience and a "can do" attitude. Higher education needs as many high performers as possible, but should be careful in the selection process. The "*they just look like a leader to me*" approach can lead to selecting folks that look good, but cannot lead. Their leadership deficiencies can be difficult to catch in time, ending in derailment.

THE TELLTALE SIGNS OF DERAILERS: FAILURE LEAVES CLUES

OVER RELIANCE ON A "SPONSOR" OR "PATRON"

Often a senior leader takes a shine to an assertive, task-focused young leader who produces results fast.[10] This initial appeal can become a protective cocoon which insulates the emerging leader when they start to hit some bumps. The young leader doesn't develop their skills simply because they don't have to. Unfortunately, such protection does not last forever, and when the senior leader moves on, the young leader, and their limitations, are exposed. They do not have the skills to lead others when their guardian leaves.

---

10   Lombardo and Eichenger, 1989; McCall and Lombardo, 1983; Zeduck, 1995.

Several years ago, I worked with a President and his senior team, who had a derailing leader. The young leader was the newly appointed CFO, named "Larry," who wanted to make a splash early and fast. He'd had some early career success regarding finances, and saw himself as a change agent. He was also a favorite of the president- which everyone knew, including Larry.

Unfortunately, he couldn't connect with any of the cabinet members and constantly complained about the "old boys" network. In his effort to lobby for the areas he was in charge of, he failed to develop a systemic view of the campus. He wanted to make things happen, but they just weren't, and in his frustration became aggressive in meetings, discourteous to others and couldn't keep commitments. The president offered excuses for his behavior by saying, "He is trying to create a sense of excellence" or "He has very high standards for himself and others", but lots of people got bruised along the way. His colleagues all agreed that he was quite smart and had a great work ethic, but found it very difficult to work with him for a host of reasons. It boiled down to the fact that they didn't trust him, his intentions or his aspirations. They did not like the way he treated people, and it seemed that he was "allowed" to behave in ways that were inappropriate given the campus's collegial culture. A yearly employee engagement survey conducted by the VP of Human Resources showed the scores for most divisions were quite positive, but unfortunately, Larry's division's scores were abysmal. This validated survey created a plain, data-based picture of a division in deep trouble.

I wanted to understand his perspective about the situation and went into the conversation both eager and curious. I was struck by several things: Larry was a terrible listener, and talked at me most of the time; he took no ownership for the data at all and communicated that a few disgruntled employees had "poisoned the well." I mentioned that this divisional survey included almost 100 people, so I found it difficult to see how a handful of people could produce such dismal results with a validated instrument. He simply ignored my comment. He had an astonishingly positive perception of himself and belittled those who didn't "get it."

I then met with the President to share my findings. He insisted that Larry could be successful, if people would just move forward and start supporting him. I strongly disagreed with his perspective and shared some information that I received from the Vice President of Human Resources: Larry's division had almost 90% turnover in the first year. Good people fled, and sought other positions throughout the campus, or left the institution for other campuses. The president argued that there was a lot of dead wood in that division and Larry was doing the tough work needed to achieve excellence. However, what he didn't know was that Larry was now on his second cadre of people, all selected by Larry, who were beginning to leave the division. It was a toxic environment, and everyone on campus knew this.

Larry lasted one more year, during which time two Vice Presidents resigned, and the Board got involved in the situation. It took over a year to find an appropriate replacement for him, because the word on the street was the division was dysfunctional and damaged.

The campus learned valuable lessons about the price that people pay for the little that derailers contribute. If the President had better listened to the information he received, and communicated in strong and clear terms that Larry's kind of leadership was not effective or wanted, the situation might have been salvageable. But his strange fondness for Larry got in the way of doing the right thing and communicated to everyone on campus that certain people could get away with that kind of negative leadership.

"ARROGANCE IS THE MOTHER OF ALL DERAILERS"

Tim Irwin explains this in his excellent book *Derailed*,[11] accurately identifying one of the pervasive flaws that derailers possess. Other researchers, too, have highlighted arrogance as a "fatal flaw."[12]

As Irwin explains, "Arrogance is a career killer." Higher education has its fair share of arrogant leaders who believe they are smarter than everyone else. They suck the air out of every conversation they have, seem to know everything and are closed to other's perspectives or honest feedback about their own ideas and leadership effectiveness.

Arrogance isn't quiet or subtle; it's as obvious as a cold blast of air and equally distasteful. When interviewing new people, hiring managers need to pay attention to behaviors like interrupting; not asking any questions (because arrogant people already know the answers); providing simple and "obvious" solutions to complex and thorny issues; talking way too much for way too long (arrogant people are horrible listeners); talking a lot about themselves, their accomplishments and how they have added value to their organizations. The same behaviors should be kept in mind when considering people for promotions. It is a good idea to seek feedback from current coworkers; they usually have a plethora of stories, anecdotes and distasteful experiences to share.

A LACK OF INTEGRITY [13]

Integrity is the keystone of personal trust and leadership withers without it. This lack is one of the most serious fatal flaws of derailers. If people experience or even perceive that a leader lacks integrity, that leader will fail.

The reality is that derailers are mostly out for themselves and often use others to get ahead. They have an acute sense of organizational politics and seek out others in positions of

---

11   Irwin, Drailed, 2012.
12   McCall and Lombardo, 1983; Sonnenfeld, 1997; Hogan and Hogan, 2001; Dolitch and Cairo, 2003.
13   Lombardo and Eichenger, 2006; Hogan, Hogan and Kaiser, 2009; Zenger and Folkman, 2009.

power and influence to ingratiate themselves, take on assignments to help pad their resume and take courses and programs to punch their own ticket. They take more credit than is due, and speak up when senior leadership is in the room to impress, but contribute little to collaborative efforts overall. Outward appearances are important to them and, as long as they "look good," that is all that matters.

Because they are often talented and have a strong technical and/or functional skillset, derailing leaders often advance quickly, early in their career. This fuels their appetite to continue to move up the ladder in quest of higher positions, compensation and recognition. Unfortunately, they do not learn much outside of their circle of competence and don't develop other skills and qualities that would make them more effective leaders. People know who these individuals are and their reputation precedes them. As their career develops, the challenges and assignments get more complex and they need help in order to be successful. Unfortunately, the word on the street is very accurate and people have no motivation to help someone who is only out for themselves, even if it would benefit the organization.[14]

It can manifest in several ways:

- Shifting blame onto others when things start to go wrong and mistakes begin to emerge. A lack of responsibility for their flaws and a propensity to point the finger at others.

- An inability to go the "last mile," instead leaving important work unfinished. This is often due to poor attention to detail, often glossing over things instead of putting in the real time and attention that is needed to do things right. This creates a perception of undependability, making them untrustworthy.

- An inability to keep their word and commitments, replaced with elaborate excuses for why things didn't get done. If confronted about their lack of performance, they often lie outright, which communicates that they can't be trusted.

---

14   McCall and Lombardo, 1983; Morrison, White and VanVelsor, 1987; Hogan, Hogan and Kaiser, 2012.

STRENGTHS BECOME WEAKNESSES

Derailing leaders frequently can be quite charismatic and personable. They have strong social skills, and often can relate well to others when they want to. However this charm and charisma is often inauthentic, and in service of their personal agendas. They scan the room while talking to someone, looking for someone influential to impress, or are nice only when they need something. Their lack of self-awareness about how they come across to others is startling at times. They simply do not see how unflatteringly their colleagues perceive them.

They also often have strong technical or functional skills (finance, legal, technology, and project management), which helps create some initial career success. They can contribute quickly, solve problems and make things happen. If they have an assertive personality, the combination of technical skills and a forceful approach can be a powerful mixture, which creates a "can do" reputation.[15] Senior leaders appreciate these types of folks. They will provide those who do with support and resources and even political cover. Unfortunately technical and functional skillsets become less important as one moves up the organizational ladder. Sophisticated abilities like strategic thinking, systems thinking, adaptive change management, and understanding complex campus politics become more important to a leader's success. Political cover hides a limited skill set as the young leader advances upward. Over time, there is little motivation to change their behavior or expand their portfolio as they solidify an "It's working, why change now?" attitude.

The combination of protectionism and too-quick promotion means that when they are placed into a higher leadership role that demands a more robust skillset, their limited repertoire is simply not enough to lead others. This can be hard to see, and instead of understanding how what got them to where they are is holding them back, they tend to double their efforts in a vain attempt to assert their leadership and gain control, resulting in ineffective behaviors like micromanaging, excluding others, working excessive hours and limiting communication. They isolate themselves and others as more volatile behaviors begin to emerge. Derailers often have great difficulty relating *authentically* to others, due to their lack

---

15   Lombardo & Eichinger 1989; Hogan, Hogan & Kaiser 2009; Inyong, 2013.

of insight and emotional intelligence.[16] Their inability to understand their impact on others means they are insensitive to the needs of others and can be abrasive, bullying, and volatile, especially under stress. Their erratic behaviors can emerge without warning or apparent reason. In many places, there is a pervasive mentality where people who produce results are forgiven for inappropriate behaviors. However this mindset is as much a hindrance to the individual as it is to the institution. As their behaviors become more well-known, people start avoiding working with them, and they get quietly cut off from the mainstream of campus life. Their inability to connect with others, build trust, and share successes, prevents them from building the *relational capital* necessary to work effectively with others. In the collegial nature of higher education, positive relationships are vital to a leader's success. Without relational capital, a leader simply cannot achieve meaningful things in service of the institution's vision and goals.

As Kaiser & Kaplan explain in *Fear Your Strengths*, "The stronger the strength, the greater danger of taking it too far."[17] In the end, what got a derailing leader to their new leadership role isn't enough to keep them there. This can play out in a variety of ways:

- "Visionaries" become unrealistic dreamers who fall in love with every creative possibility they encounter.

- An "action orientated" leader becomes a mean autocrat, bruising people along the way, insisting that things be done their way or not at all.

- A "decisive" leader makes a string of bad decisions because they have not thought through the potential impacts and implications of their decisions. They gauge their success by how *many* decisions they make, not on how good they are.

- A "collaborative" leader tries to include everyone in everything and nothing meaningful is accomplished.

- An "optimistic" leader convinces themselves that everything will be all right, despite powerful evidence that a crisis is looming, and the time for proactive behaviors are missed.

---

16   McCauley and Lombardo, 1990; McCall and Lombardo, 1990; Hughes, Ginnet and Curly, 2002; Fisher, 2005; Zenger and Folkman, 2009.

17   Fear Your Strengths" Kaiser & Kaplan.

Kaiser & Kaplan explain that a developmental approach focused exclusively on a leader's strengths will not prevent derailment. Every leader needs to be committed to continual learning and development, in order to avoid developing an over-reliance on their strengths, or under-developing their weaknesses.[18] They need to know and own their strengths, and deeply understand their weaknesses, in order to grow. For too many years, leadership development was a "deficit" model which worked primarily on improving a leader's weaknesses. Several best sellers have captured a great deal of attention and refocused much of the leadership research on leaders' strengths vs. their weaknesses, including *Now Discover Your Strengths* (2001) by Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Sutton and *Strengths Finders 2.0* (2007) by Tom Roth. These books explain that having a full picture of their capacities, limitations and skills creates a choice point for young leaders. They might not decide to improve their weaknesses but at least they have the opportunity to choose.

INABILITY TO BUILD A TEAM [19]

To build and nurture a team is a daunting task[20] and is a prerequisite for leadership in higher education. Effective leaders get things done through the great effort of others, while derailing leaders simply do not have what it takes to create a high performing team. They lack the social skills (e.g. good listening, emotional composure, sensitivity to other's needs, sharing credit and recognition) absolutely necessary for a team leader. They have difficulty molding a team for several reasons:[21]

- They often have an autocratic leadership style, especially under stress, which translates into an "It's my way or the highway" attitude.

- They tend to avoid conflict. However conflict doesn't get better with age. It takes real courage *and* skill to effectively deal with team conflict.

- They can be abrasive and bullying when confronted with contrary opinions, ideas, facts or scenarios. Others shut down in their presence because they quickly realize that they will not be heard.

---

18   Kaplan & Kaiser, 2009; Kaiser & Overfield, 2011.
19   Bentz, 1985; McCauley &Lombardo 1990; Eichenger & Lombardo, 2003; Lombardo & Eichenger (2006) Hogan, Hogan & Kaiser,(2009) Irwin, (2012).
20   Sanaghan & Eberbach, 2014.
21   Lombardo & Eichenger 1989; 2006.

- In recruiting team members, they frequently choose mediocre talent or "comfortable cloning"[22] where they pick people who are similar to them in background, temperament, education, etc., and who are therefore "comfortable" to them. They rarely seek out diversity, because they see differences as liabilities instead of assets.

In the fast paced world of higher education, full of complexity and ambiguity, we will need effective teams throughout our campuses collaboratively working together. Derailers simply won't be able to function in that kind of environment.

Higher education is facing many complex challenges, and derailers tend to find change and transitions especially difficult to deal with.[23] They often get trapped in their offices instead of proactively interacting with others. They can become perfectionistic, over-analyzing everything, which can delay decision-making. They lose sight of the bigger picture and focus on minute details. If they are part of an organizational redesign and find themselves reporting to new leaders, working with new people and dealing with a different institutional culture, they often cannot make the adjustment. Under times of stress and change, a derailing leader's inappropriate and ineffective behaviors begin to emerge and their need for control can quickly develop into micromanaging others. The pace of derailment quickens under these circumstances, and there are very few ways to prevent or even slow down the derailment process.

FAILURE TO MEET LONG TERM BUSINESS GOALS [24]

When a derailing leader starts to miss deadlines, under-performing regarding agreed-upon goals, and becomes a liability within a work group, the damage has already begun. Instead of reaching out to their peers and supervisors and seeking support and advice, they tend to isolate themselves, withdraw into their offices, and start to micromanage their direct reports.

---

22   Sanaghan & Lohndorf, 2014.
23   McCall and Lombardo, 1983; Zaccaro, 2001; Ready 2005; Hogan, Hogan and Kaiser, 2009; Furnham and Taylor, 2010.
24   McCall & Lombardo, (1983); Ready,(2005); Hogan,Hogan & Kaiser (2009); Furnham& Taylor (2010).

It is difficult for them to understand why they are failing, after experiencing initial success in their careers and often after performing at high levels. What worked before simply doesn't work now, and their weaknesses outshine their limited strengths—and everyone knows it.

This is why effective supervision is so essential to building and supporting leaders on campus. A derailing leader rarely asks for help, so missing deadlines and agreed-upon goals is an early warning system for a supervisor. Supervisors need to intervene quickly to assess the situation.

SHARE YOUR EXPERTISE
CONTRIBUTE TO FUTURE PAPERS & PROGRAMS

Looking for more on leadership? Trouble finding leadership resources specifically for higher-ed?

We are seeking papers, articles and presentations that will help other higher-ed leaders on their own leadership journey. We want materials that focus on practical takeaways and steps for reflection and action – not leadership theory. If you have articles, papers, or presentations that you would like to share, send them in for review. You can even nominate a colleague.

We promise to review and provide constructive feedback for **every** submission.

Please help us in our effort to spread good ideas about leadership throughout our campuses. Submit any ideas, articles, and questions to Pat Sanaghan: sanaghan@academicimpressions.com.

HOW TO PREVENT DERAILMENT

There are two ways to approach derailment: *personally* and *institutionally*. Both are needed in equal measure.

PERSONAL STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING DERAILMENT

In an earlier paper, *The Seduction of the Leader* (Academic Impressions: 2013), I discussed how critical it is that leaders regularly **seek honest feedback**.

The best leaders actively seek anonymous feedback from others. They understand that even though most people are open and honest individuals, they will rarely "tell it like it is" to their leaders, *even if they are asked*, for a host of reasons: people have a hard time delivering difficult news; the "collegial" nature of higher education tends to be conflict averse; avoidance of hurt feelings. Therefore, leaders need to be proactive when it comes to obtaining feedback from others:

1. ENGAGE IN A 360° FEEDBACK PROCESS

In this process, you periodically (about every two years) seek *anonymous* feedback from others. This process has been around for decades that take an investment of time and attention. It is also a risky endeavor because it can reveal both wonderful *and* uncomfortable things about leadership effectiveness.

2. CONDUCT A "LEADERSHIP AUDIT"

A *leadership audit*[25] is a lighter version of a robust 360° process which involves a validated instrument. It consists of three simple questions that will provide any leader with helpful qualitative information:

A. What are my five greatest strengths as a leader?

B. What is one area of needed development I should be aware of and conscious about?

C. What is one piece of advice you would like to provide me that would help me in my current role?

Don't be fooled by the simplicity of these questions; they will reap powerful information. It is most helpful to select at least 10 people to participate in this process including peers, supervisors, subordinates and coworkers. Anonymity is essential, so it is often helpful for the human resources department or another trusted leader to collect the data and create a confidential report for review. After that, the leader who undertakes the *leadership audit*, can meet with their direct supervisor and share in broad strokes the major themes form the audit. This is their decision to make. No one should ever feel like they should share all their data with their direct supervisor. This goes for the 360 degree feedback process also. These feedback processes are learning tools to enhance the leader's effectiveness and should not be part of an "official" performance review process.

---

25   Sanaghan & Eberbach, 2013.

3. CULTIVATE CONFIDANTS [26]

Where do leaders, especially presidents, go when they are dealing with their leadership challenges, doubts and fears? Heifetz and Linsky suggest they find at least two "confidants" who are deeply trusted and honest individuals who will provide constructive feedback, advice and wise council, and develop an ongoing relationship. These are authentic allies who will listen carefully, push back on ideas, help develop insight and act as sanctuaries when the inevitable storms hit. They are invaluable. A young leader should be meeting with their confidants on a regular basis, not only in times of trouble. No leader should ever walk alone.

4. BUILD IN INTROSPECTION

It's helpful for leaders to keep some kind of journal or record of their thoughts and feelings as they lead others. This reflective discipline is not easy to do, yet it creates the opportunity for deep learning and develops self-awareness.[27] There are plenty of ways to capture your reflections and thoughts: a paper journal, recording or video, apps like *Penzu* or *Idone This*. Those who can't "find the time" for this simple practice might already be in trouble. Derailing leaders often lack self-awareness and simply fail to reflect on their behaviors, feelings and leadership effectiveness.[28] Capturing these thoughts will often reveal important and strategic information that might not be apparent at first glance. Some thoughtful questions can create the framework for thinking about leadership effectiveness:

- What challenges am I encountering?

- What questions seem to come up over and over?

- Who confides in me? Asks me for advice?

- What is the "pulse" of my team? How are they feeling? How are they performing?

- Are my team meetings productive? How do I know this?

---

26   Heifetz and Linsky, 2002.
27   Goleman, 1995; 2002.
28   Hogan, Hogan and Kaiser, 2009; Lombardo and Eichenger, 2006.

- Who are my allies? Who can I confide in?

- What is the quality of my important decisions recently?

- What doubts am I having? What makes me anxious?

- What is going well? What do I need to be appreciative of?

- Who do I need to recognize and appreciate more?

- What are other leaders in my organization talking about? Worried about? Excited about?

- Can people provide me with honest feedback?

5. BROADEN THE PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO

Proactively avoid becoming a one trick pony with a narrow skillset by taking on "stretch" assignments that will build leadership strengths. Consciously choose new tasks that focus on learning new things, without being too big, complex or difficult. Confidants and supervisors can provide honest advice about the nature and complexity of stretch assignments and provide emotional support as the learning curve deepens.

Leaders should invest in their own professional development in a conscious and disciplined way through a Learning Agenda that identifies: books they will read; courses they will take; programs they will attend; people they want to learn from and potential mentors.

6. GET A COACH

Executive coaching has been widely used in the corporate sector for years to help leaders be more effective, and is beginning to become a more familiar practice in higher education.[29] It is primarily a skill-based support process and is not therapy. In a Harvard Business Review article, *What Can Coaching Do for You?* (2009), Diane Coutu and Carol Kaufman identify the 3 main reasons coaches are utilized in organizations, in order of priority:

---

29   Weinstock, 2011;Trotta, 2014.

A.   Develop high potential leaders or facilitate a leadership transition

B.   Act as a sounding board

C.   Address derailing behavior

There are many variations in how coaching is done. Some coaches work only face to face, while others work on the phone or use videoconferencing tools, such as Skype. Some coaches will collect data about the "coachee" through surveys and interviews, while others will work only with the client's own identification of needs. Regardless of the methodology, the coaching process generally looks like this:[30]

- Identifying the coachee's challenge

- Identifying specific coaching goals that will address the challenge

- Understanding the challenge in light of self–assessment

- Creating and brainstorming strategies to achieve goals

- Acting upon those strategies

- Tracking the success of the strategies, both the tangible outcomes and the client's subjective experience

- Acknowledge successes

- Evaluating the coaching process

A couple of suggestions for people who are interested in finding more about coaching:

- *Coaching for Breakthrough Success* (2013) by Jack Canfield and Peter Chee. They provide some very helpful ideas about coaching and have a holistic perspective about coaching that some will find interesting. They believe that coaching is an empowering process of drawing out solutions from people through effective listening and asking great questions.

---

30   Weinstock, (2009).

- *Thanks for the Feedback* (2014) by Douglass Stone and Sheila Heen. They have an interesting take on how to receive feedback from others, whether through coaching, working with peers or in a supervisory process. They identify 3 different kinds of feedback: 1) Appreciation, 2) Coaching, 3) Evaluation, which are very different processes and they suggest strategies on how to utilize the feedback you receive in the most constructive way possible.

- *Creating Coaching Cultures: What Business Leaders Expect and How to Get There* (2009) (A Center for Creative Leadership White Paper) identifies some of the essential elements of an organizational or "systems" approach to coaching.

7. LEARN TO ASK FOR HELP

There is a pervasive myth that lives large in higher education that asking for help is a sign of indecision or weakness and that somehow, they should know everything they need to know about their role's responsibilities, challenges and complexities.[31] As explained in *Smart People Ask for (My) Advice: Seeking Advice Boosts Perceptions of Competence*[32] asking for help, support and advice before it is too late is almost always a smart and courageous thing to do. One of higher education's greatest assets are the willingness of people to provide support and assistance, *if asked*. The "collegial" nature of many of our campuses encourages helping others. While it's true that on some toxic campuses, asking for help would not be the smart thing to do as it's seen as a sign of incompetence and weakness, such campuses are the exception, not the rule.

---

31 Ashkenas, (2013) & Gibson (2014).
32 Smart People Ask for (My) Advice: Seeking Advice Boosts Perceptions of Competence, 2014.

INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING DERAILMENT

1. SENIOR LEADERS NEED TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE OF DERAILMENT WITH ALL THEIR DIRECT REPORTS

Identify an article or book to discuss at a yearly *"chew and chat"* or working breakfast or lunch where small groups talk about the implications of derailment and how to prevent it from happening on their campus. Senior leadership has to model the way and participate and fully support these yearly (at least) discussions. Their authentic involvement will communicate that it is an important issue for the campus to consider and that leaders have specific expectations for the behaviors that will and will not be tolerated on their campus.

2. DESIGN AND INSTITUTIONALIZE EFFECTIVE SUPERVISORY PROCESSES

Effective supervision is one of the most effective ways to avoid derailment as it provides the necessary ongoing feedback for all employees and helps ensure that inappropriate behavior is stopped in its tracks. It should build on the strengths of the employee but also be direct and honest about areas of needed development. An annual supervisory exercise is inadequate; effective supervision takes real time and attention for leaders to do it well, and the investment almost always pays off with motivated employees, better performance and helps stop derailing behaviors quickly. Effective supervision can constructively interfere with the derailing process, because it provides timely feedback, advice and perspective.

For an example of an effective supervisory process, see Appendix B.

3. SIMPLY DO NOT TOLERATE VOLATILE AND INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR

There is never, ever, a good reason for a leader to berate an employee.

MINI CASE STUDY

During a meeting, the vice president for enrollment began to unravel because he wasn't hitting his enrollment targets and started berating marketing and retention efforts by his colleagues. The president quietly and quickly intervened by calling a recess. She spoke with the vice president for enrollment in private and clearly stated her expectations for appropriate behavior, respectfully and directly asking if he thought he could discuss the issue appropriately. The V.P. agreed and the meeting continued. The president maintained the dignity of the vice president and clearly communicated her expectations for appropriate behavior in her meetings.

4. REWARD DEEP MENTORING [33]

"Those who have torches, will pass them onto others." -Plato

As young people begin to migrate up their career ladder, they need access to wise and trusted advice. Every senior leader on a campus should model the way by mentoring emerging leaders several layers down in the organization. This communicates to all campus stakeholders that the institution is committed to developing its leaders. These mentors can provide strategic insight, counsel and support for leaders who are learning *how* to lead. Mentoring must be supported in the performance review process by recognizing and rewarding those leaders who help grow others. Unless the supervisory process includes a leader's ability to mentor others, it may not become an institutional priority or practice. Many senior leaders are already overwhelmed within their day-to-day responsibilities. Finding time to mentor and motivate someone can be a major effort and institutional support is essential.

---

33   Sanaghan & Jurow, 2011.

Avoid "*comfortable cloning*"[34]

"Comfortable cloning" is the tendency to hire and develop potential and emerging leaders who are *similar* to us (e.g., background, gender, race, leadership style, education), because we are "comfortable" with them. This subconscious cloning process could have a powerful and adverse influence on *who* we mentor and develop. I would suggest that mentors "*cross a boundary*" when selecting emerging leaders to help grow and develop. If they can select someone from a different race, gender or life experience, the leadership leverage that is achieved can be powerful.

Be conscious of "*stylistic invisibles*"

Linda Hill from Harvard provides us with this intriguing and provocative term. She is describing an embedded bias many of us have. There are certain people who don't "fit" our conventional image of what a leader "should" look like. They tend to be quiet, reserved and highly competent contributors who act with integrity and care. They do not seek the limelight, recognition or praise but possess many leadership qualities. They need to be identified and mentored effectively. The high potentials and "charismatic" emerging leaders are easy to identify, while the "invisibles" are harder to detect, but worth the extra effort.

5. PROVIDE DEVELOPMENTAL ASSIGNMENTS

This is where effective, disciplined and supportive supervision comes into the picture. Every supervisor should understand the strengths and weaknesses of all their direct reports. This enables them to select appropriate developmental assignments that will build on the strengths and develop the weaknesses of their people. There needs to be a balanced approach to the allocation of these learning experiences, so that the assignments aren't all "stretch" assignments focused on their areas of weakness. Careful and thoughtful selection of these relevant tasks can build the leadership muscles of their direct reports. The supervisor's direct reports need to understand the rationale behind the assignments, how it will contribute to their learning and development and how it adds value to campus efforts to move forward.

---

34   Sanaghan and Lohndorf, 2014.

For example:

- An emerging leader might be asked to serve on a campus wide strategic planning task force. Which will enable them to work with colleagues across the campus, and often meet some of the real players and scholars within the institution. They will learn about strategic thinking, environmental analysis, collaborative problem solving and institutional values. Most importantly, they will begin to develop the *relational capital* they will need to conduct cross-boundary work in service of the institution's vision and goals.

- They can serve on local community development committees and task forces, which will expose them to external stakeholders' perspectives and provide them with a picture of how the campus is seen by "outsiders" in the surrounding community. Often they learn about the real challenges too many of our communities face, like poverty, obtaining a quality education, food scarcity, or violent neighborhoods.

- They can head a task force to improve campus wide or divisional communications. This will help them build their influence skills, especially if those participating on the task force don't report to them. Organizing a coherent and agile communication process takes a systems perspective and can teach the leader "how" things actually work on their campus. The combination of the nuts and bolts details of effective communication and more sophisticated processes like quality control, managing the rumor mill, creating diverse communication vehicles and feedback mechanisms, can be a game changer for an emerging leader.

The purpose of these developmental assignments is to help build their leadership portfolio both wide (across campus boundaries) and deep (develop a content expertise). Their supervisors need to meet with them periodically *throughout* the learning journey, not just at the end of the assignment, to identify what they are learning, what insights they are gaining, difficulties they are encountering, and what support they need.

For many years, researchers at The Center For Creative Leadership have found that "embedded work," which is the real work leaders do every day, is one of the most powerful and effective ways to develop leadership.[35]

35   Dotlich & Noel, 1998: Moxley, O'Connor & Wilson, 1998; Hernez-Broome, & Hughes, 2004.

6. WATCH OUT FOR "*FAST TRACKING*" A YOUNG AND EMERGING LEADER

It's easy to be impressed with a sharp, quick-on-their-feet, charismatic "doer." Hopes and aspirations loom large and can hide their many limitations. Make sure they develop a well-rounded portfolio of skills and qualities before promoting them, rewarding them with high profile assignments or sending them to prestigious courses and programs. Moving them through the ranks too quickly can accelerate the derailing process.

Avoid testing high potentials by giving them complex and difficult assignments and letting them "fend" for themselves. This is the old "baptism by fire" approach that lived large in many organizations for decades. Challenges are part of the learning process for sure, but they need to be supported by good supervision, ongoing feedback, effective coaching and not with the belief that "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger."[36]

7. REMEMBER THE "*STYLISTIC INVISIBLES*"

These individuals often possess huge leadership potential but, somehow, are "invisible" to us because they don't fit our *mental model* of what leaders look like. They don't seek attention or praise but produce results, act with integrity and treat people with care. All of these are essential leadership qualities.[37]

Interested leaders are encouraged to read "*Leading Quietly*" (2002) by Joseph Badaracco, who describes such individuals as possessing the virtues of restraint, modesty, and tenacity. We need more of these kinds of leaders on our campuses.

Senior leaders need to "grow" a diverse set of leaders throughout our campuses, and we must be diligent about *how* we select emerging leaders to develop. Pay attention to the introverts and quiet ones; the "charismatic" ones are always easy to identify.

---

36 McCauley, DeRue, Yost & Taylor, 2014.
37 Sanaghan & Jurow, 2011.

8. MANAGE LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS CAREFULLY [38]

When a leader moves up the career ladder or to another division or school on campus, it can be a fragile time. There will be different cultural norms, expectations, and rules. Very rarely are these ever written down somewhere, and the new leader has to figure things out. Some tried and true behaviors will be acceptable; some will not. What worked in the previous job, may not work anymore.[39]

The supervisor of a transitioning leader needs to play close attention to the process, especially if the leader is new to the campus. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) has identified a model/framework called the 4C's, which they use for on-boarding new employees:

A. **COMPLIANCE:** This is the nuts and bolts, where new employees are taught the legal and policy regulations of the organization by HR or a supervisor.

B. **CLARIFICATION:** Making sure that the new employee understands their new job and related expectations is an important part of the supervisor's responsibility. These different expectations need to be communicated carefully over time; it is not enough to cram a lot of information into one meeting and then ask if there are any questions. Instead, it should be several conversations, where the supervisor probes for understanding, gives the new employee time to develop questions and makes sure that everyone is on the same page.

C. **CULTURE:** This is the most critical part of the transition process, where the supervisor provides the transitioning leader with a sense of organizational norms, both formal and informal. This must be done thoughtfully and patiently. It is essential that the new leader understand the complexity, nuance and mystery of the culture of the new place to avoid a "cultural mismatch"[40] where the new person starts to derail early because they are left to bump along into tradition, people, hidden beliefs and "the way we do things around here." Explain in explicit terms, what is accepted, what works and what isn't tolerated. Do not let them figure it out for themselves; that's a recipe for disaster. It is also helpful to have several colleagues share what they think are the cultural norms and tell some stories that reflect the culture of the new organization.

---

38   Goldsmith, (2007) ; Sanaghan, Gaval & Goldstein, (2009).
39   Goldsmith, (2007).
40   Sanaghan, Gaval & Goldstein, 2009.

D.   CONNECTION: The supervisor needs to help the transitioning leader develop the interpersonal relationships they will need in others to work with others successfully. The supervisor needs to arrange specific meetings and opportunities to get to know key employees. These are opportunities to build a relational connection with others and must be carefully crafted to ensure maximum benefit. Beginnings are important; take the time to do it right.

The second "Connection" element is identifying the information network the transitioning leader will need to be successful. Identify who they need to talk with to get information, perspective, advice, and answers to questions. The supervisor needs to make the introductions for these individuals and help the new leader build their own information network as fast as possible.

9. WATCH OUT FOR WORKLOAD [41]

It is important that leaders and supervisors monitor the workload of all their direct reports. It's common on campuses to find too much work piled onto too-full plates, which dedicated and hard working people find hard to turn down. Because so many people are dedicated to the missions of their institutions, they put in extra effort and time to accomplish the goals and objectives of their campus. However, when followers don't want to disappoint their boss, or don't see them working as hard, they often take on more work than they can do or should do. Quality over time begins to decline, and people grow frustrated because they know that their work standards are lower than they want them to be. It is a vicious trap and supervisors are usually the culprits here. They need to be acutely aware of this dynamic and help their direct reports manage both their expectations and their workload. The key thing to remember here is that too much work can trigger the derailment process.

---

41   Gentry &Shannock 2008; Gentry 2011; Weinzemer & McConnaughey 2012.

10. CONDUCT SENIOR LEADERSHIP DIALOGUES NOT MONOLOGUES

No institution needs a series of "talking heads" sharing their wit and wisdom about leadership with aspiring & emerging leaders. Senior leaders need to share their successes *and* their failures so emerging leaders understand that nobody reaches the senior levels of leadership without making mistakes. Such conversations change the climate of the room and encourage an authentic conversation about real leadership. It is a gift that too few senior leaders have the courage to share. Consider Sharing:

- What guiding principles helped you lead through a difficult situation?

- How do you develop the toughness to make hard decisions and yet remain sensitive to the needs of others?

- How do you build trust on a campus? What have you done to rebuild trust once it has been damaged?

- Who do you talk with during difficult times? Do you have supporters and confidants?

- Do you feel guilty about some of the decisions you have made?

- Who are your leadership heroes? Who do you admire and respect? Why?

- As a leader have you ever felt lost or confused? How did you respond?

- When you look back on your leadership journey, what are two important lessons you would be willing to share?

- How do you take care of yourself? How do you seek balance in your life?

- What was an ethical dilemma you witnessed or faced? What did you do?

- What are some of your strengths that you have to be conscious of not overdoing?

These simple yet powerful questions can create a rare conversation that is a memorable learning experience for emerging leaders. It separates all the theory and platitudes about leadership and discusses leadership honestly, warts and all. This kind of dialogue is essential to helping aspiring leaders realize that:

- It is smart to ask for help when you are in trouble

- Honesty and integrity are the lifeblood of authentic leadership, and without them, you can not lead

- There is a difference between "smartship" and leadership

- Making mistakes is inevitable and part of the leadership journey

- Leading a team is a privilege

- Aspiration is nobler than ambition and appetite

- Trust is a "strategic asset" that every leader needs in order to lead others

11. CONSIDER GIVING DERAILING LEADERS A SABBATICAL

This notion might sound somewhat counterintuitive, but can work:

Example A

One example is of a dean of a large college. He was ambitious, a brilliant academic, and wanted someday to become a president, but was experiencing some difficulty in his new role. In his first term, he encountered many challenges, mostly interpersonal and relational in nature, and was unable to understand why his faculty colleagues couldn't see how smart his ideas were. He began to crumble toward the end of the first semester and it became obvious that he might fail in his first deanship. The president intervened and suggested that he take a one semester sabbatical on two conditions: the dean had to go through a 360-degree feedback process and gather anonymous data on how he was seen by his colleagues, and he had to agree to an executive coach who would review the data with him. He readily agreed to both.

He returned after a semester with a game plan to deal with his shortcomings. He met with his department chairs to share in broad strokes what he had learned and encouraged them to be open and honest with him in the future and if they thought he wasn't listening, flag the issue. This took courage and he gained the respect and support of his people. He has been a successful dean for several years, and is considering being a president soon.

Example B

In another case, a vice president of student affairs was going through a difficult set of personal setbacks (i.e. his father was ill, and he was in the middle of a divorce). This leader was well liked and respected, but started to blow up at meetings. He became critical of his direct reports in public and was under-performing his assigned responsibilities.

The vice president of human resources met with the president to relay her concerns about the situation and together they met with the vice president of student affairs. He was given a month off to take care of his family and personal needs. This created the breathing space he needed to collect his thoughts and feelings and come up with a plan to deal with the two challenging situations.

He returned in a month and committed to the president that he would not exhibit the inappropriate behaviors again. He kept his word, and began to do a good job once again.

There are no guarantees with these kinds of sabbaticals, and some campuses might not be able to provide this kind of practice for their derailing leaders. But if possible, it's important to consider all creative approaches.

SUMMARY

Derailment lives large in higher education, but remains hidden. This is understandable, as sensitive issues are always difficult to talk about; it can be embarrassing for both the individual and the institution. However, in a society where 50% of leaders and managers fail, institutions should be proactive and openly discuss this issue on campuses to afford losing so many promising leaders. Leadership is essential to success in higher education, and derailment takes away from the overall ability of an institution to move ahead.

Not a hot topic, but an important one.

APPENDIX A:
SOME CRITICAL RESEARCH

THE LEADERSHIP ARCHITECT-KORN FERRY & LOMINGER INTERNATIONAL (2008)

Lominger International created a "Negative Competency" library called "Stallers and Stoppers," which is comprised of nineteen characteristics that contribute to executive derailment. It is a useful diagnostic tool that identifies where leaders go wrong, and it should be included in campus wide discussions to better understand the minefield of leadership derailment. Here are the characteristics:

- UNABLE TO ADAPT TO DIFFERENCES

- POOR ADMINISTRATORS

- OVERLY AMBITIOUS

- ARROGANT

- BETRAYAL OF TRUST

- BLOCKED PERSONAL LEARNER

- LACK OF COMPOSURE

- DEFENSIVENESS

- LACK OF ETHICS AND VALUES

- FAILURE TO BUILD A TEAM

- FAILURE TO STAFF EFFECTIVELY

- INSENSITIVE TO OTHERS

- KEY SKILLS DEFICIENCY

- OVERMANAGING

- OVERDEPENDENCE ON AN ADVOCATE

- PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS

- POLITICAL MISTEPS

- NON STRATEGIC

- OVER DEPENDENCE ON A SINGLE SKILL

Interestingly, managers often rate themselves lower on these characteristics than their supervisors, direct reports and peers rate them; in fact, the higher the position in management, the larger the gap in how they see rate themselves versus how others rate them. They perceive themselves as less likely to derail than others do. Everyone seems to know who will derail, except the managers themselves! These blind spots can be fatal to an organization.

APPENDIX B:
SUPERVISORY DIALOGUE

By Patrick Sanaghan

The "Supervisory Dialogue" was informed and influenced by the initial thinking of Dr. Rodney Napier over 25 years ago.

The following ideas and proposed process do not deal with some of the legal issues that a supervision process should include. It also does not deal with ineffective or poor performing employees. There are plenty of articles and books in the field that deal with these topics. It is hoped that this concept paper might create real discussion about supervision within your organization. In the end, you need to design a supervisory process that meets your unique needs, organizational culture, strategy, and goals.

SOME THOUGHTS….

1. Supervision, if it is to be effective, must be valued by the organization. This means that leaders need to be trained, supported, and rewarded for supervision to be truly effective, especially at the top levels of senior management. (This is rarely the case.)

2. Effective supervision communicates to people throughout the organization that investing time and support in people is an organizational value. It also communicates that honest feedback, rigorous goal setting, good communication, and developing people is prized by the organization.

3. Supervision is essentially about the relationship between the supervisor and employee. Without an honest, open, and supportive relationship based on trust, real supervision cannot take place. (The classic Failure of Management by Objectives (M.B.O.) in the 1970's and 80's was due to the lack of attention paid to the relationship between the boss and the subordinate. In theory, it looked great on paper. The boss and subordinate would set mutual goals and performance standards and everything would be wonderful. Unfortunately, when there is little trust in the organization or between the supervisor and supervisee, employees will set minimal goals. Without trust, people tend not to take risks, stretch themselves, experiment, or make themselves vulnerable. What ends up happening is a negotiation around minimal goals and expectations. In the end, organizations achieve mediocrity). Pay attention to the relationship.

4. The employee is in a vulnerable position in a supervisory process. The supervisor is in the "power" position because he/she can reward or punish the employee. The supervisor needs to be proactive in establishing a safe and trusting relationship with the employee. They can do this by: listening carefully (very difficult to do); providing clear examples of performance; focusing on the strengths of the individual; giving honest feedback,; and being interested in the development of the employee.

   Unfortunately, supervision is not a sexy topic. The current rage is "leadership". All the leadership in the world does not produce results. People do. Effective leaders deeply understand that you achieve meaningful results (add value) through the hard work and thinking of people. Supervision enables leaders to accomplish things because it builds the capacity of people, supports their development, and holds them appropriately accountable. It is important but not glitzy work. It is desperately needed in our organizations.

5. Effective supervision takes time. The research shows that we spend an average of an hour a year in some kind of supervisory process with most employees. These tend to be perfunctory sessions, utilizing checklists, and focusing on a one-way dialogue from the supervisor to the supervisee. Real supervision is an investment of time in the employee, but not much time. Somehow we have convinced ourselves that there is no time to do real supervision because there is too much work to do! We often spend much of our time putting out fires, being reactive, and going from one crisis to another. Too often, people are rewarded for being busy and not for being productive. We often hear leaders say, "I don't have enough time to supervise!" That is a myth.

THE FACTS

1. A "typical" workweek is 40 hours (for most of us it's 50 – 60 hours).

2. A work year consists of 2000 hours, excluding two weeks for vacation (again, most of us have real work years consisting of 2500 – 3000 hours per year).

3. The proposed supervisory process/schedule would take approximately 8 – 10 hours per employee, per year. Which is about 1/2 of 1% of your total available work time. Even if you have 8 –10 direct reports, this would take approximately 5% of your work time, leaving you lots of time to do other "important" stuff.

    Bottom line: There is no excuse for not investing a fraction of your time developing your people. If you cannot find the time, look at the results you are producing not all the busy activity.

A PROPOSED MODEL

I. THE INITIAL SUPERVISORY MEETING:

This meeting would take place yearly and be approximately 1-1/2 – 2 hours in duration. Both parties (supervisor and supervisee) should come to the table very well prepared. This is not an informal meeting and should be treated seriously.

This meeting should be an in-depth discussion, reviewing the employee's progress, accomplishments, contribution, and work of the previous year. The employee should have some clear examples and indicators of success (e.g., completing a project; writing a report; negotiating a business opportunity; implementing a process or procedure; etc.). The supervisor should also come to the meeting with examples of the employee's productivity and accomplishments.

To provide an appropriate structure to this discussion, an agreed upon set of questions should be crafted. These questions promote good dialogue, reveal areas of strengths and focus on areas of needed development. Creating these questions together enables both parties to "own" the process and, therefore, the outcomes.

The following questions are working examples that many people have found helpful and constructive. Both the supervisor and the supervisee must answer these questions before they meet for the initial meeting. The purpose of this is to ensure both parties are prepared for the meeting and the homework enables each party to share their perspective.

1. When you look back over the past year, what stands out to you regarding what you have accomplished? Please be as specific as possible.

2. What have been some important "lessons learned" from the past year? This could be either positive or negative lessons (e.g., "I learned that I am a little too ambitious when I think about what I can actually accomplish", or "I am better at project management than I originally thought", or "I have to be more rigorous in establishing timelines and deadlines".)

3. What have been some challenges or difficulties you have encountered over the year? Have there been any disappointments?

4. What are some things you would like to accomplish over the next 6 – 12 months? (Please provide a rationale for each goal and a way to measure them.)

5. What are 1 – 2 areas of "needed development" you need to work on this year? Why do you need to work on them? How will they enhance your effectiveness (e.g., "I need to be more assertive in meetings"; "I need to become a more effective listener"; "I need to focus my attention and energy on fewer things and not try and do everything")

6. What support (e.g., education, specific courses, coaching, experiences) do you believe would be essential in helping you be successful this upcoming year? Please be specific.

7. How can I be supportive as your supervisor? (e.g., Spend more time with you? Develop a learning network? Provide more timely feedback?)

(These questions create an information data base that is rarely accessed in most supervisory meetings. It is obvious that if there is not a constructive and honest relationship based on trust between the two parties, these questions cannot be answered.)

Both parties would share their perspectives and examples with each other. Reviewing one question at a time, they would identify common ground themes and clarify differences. This takes time, patience, and good listening.

The most important outcome or product of this meeting is an agreed upon set of performance goals for the employee. The employee needs to clearly understand what is expected of them over the next 3, 6 and 12 months; along with expected support, resources, lines of authority, reporting mechanisms, and ways to measure success and progress. (A brief follow-up meeting, 20 – 30 minutes or so, should be conducted about a week after the initial supervisory meeting. This time is an opportunity to have both parties reflect upon the review, share insights, rightsize expectations, and correct any misconceptions.)

II. MONTHLY "CHECK-INS"

These are brief, scheduled meetings (30 minutes) to maintain the dialogue, rightsize expectations, provide feedback, problem solve, and build the supervisor – supervisee relationship. An employee should never be surprised at the end of the year that they are not meeting their goals, and making a contribution. These check-ins prevent this from happening. A short summary of this meeting should be recorded.

III. "HALF-TIME" CHECK-IN

This meeting would be conducted approximately six months after the initial meeting and be formal in nature. It should take about an hour and have some structure to it. This is an opportunity to determine what has been accomplished so far and what is reasonable to accomplish over the next six months. This "half-time" meeting could easily take an hour and, again, take some thought and preparation beforehand. (A brief review of the initial supervisory questions might be helpful.)

IV. 360° FEEDBACK

This feedback process has been around for over 20 years and there are many excellent books and articles describing how to do it right. It does take some time and preparation to implement the process but, if it is done well, it is well worth the effort. Ideally, it would be great if everyone throughout the organization participated in some kind of 360° process. Realistically, it should involve, at a minimum, all formal leaders in an organization.

In short, the 360° process involves soliciting (anonymous) feedback from a diverse set of stakeholders who interact with a particular leader. The primary purpose is to create an honest and wholistic picture about how a particular individual is seen and experienced by people they work with.

A confidential report is created after participants provide the necessary information, detailing the strengths and weaknesses of the individual. Most importantly, the supervisor needs to help create an action plan that builds on the strength of the individual and improves the areas of needed development. This is essential. A 360° feedback process is not an intellectual exercise. It is meant to create a rich database that moves an individual toward change and enhancement.

Ideally, leaders should participate in this 360° feedback process yearly. Some attention needs to be paid to the process so it doesn't become a routine exercise but rather a development of leadership skills throughout the organization.

V. A LEARNING AGENDA

If a supervisory process is to have integrity and add value to the organization, it must include a learning process. After the (yearly) or initial discussion, both parties need to agree on a plan for improvement for the supervisee. Their improvement plan should focus on both the strengths and areas of needed development of the employee.

For example: If an employee realizes that they need help with managing their time, selected courses should be identified and participation ensured. Most importantly, the supervisor and supervisee need to agree on some practical measures to monitor the employee's progress regarding time management. Just taking the course is not enough, it must impact behavior. (e.g., "We will monitor the number of times you deliver your monthly production reports on time"; or "Periodically, we will keep track of your timeliness in our staff meetings"). The purpose is to measure results, not activities.

Another example: If an employee recognizes that they need to be more assertive in staff meetings because they often have something to contribute but don't. A learning agenda might involve taking some assertiveness training courses, reading appropriate books regarding assertiveness, and getting some counseling from a professional. The end result should be a change in the behavior of the employee, not more knowledge about assertiveness. The supervisee and supervisor can agree to track the number of times the supervisee speaks up in meetings.

Every employee should be working on their "learning agenda" throughout the year. There is always something to improve or build upon. Don't leave the supervisory meeting without agreeing upon your learning agenda with appropriate support (courses, coaching, reading, etc.).

THE RATIONALE BEHIND THE SEVEN QUESTIONS

1. **When you look back over the past year, what stands out to you regarding what you have accomplished?** *(Please be specific)*

   The first question focuses on the positive accomplishments and successes of the team member. It creates the foundation for the *Supervisory Dialogue* and is the most important question in the entire process.

   The team member helps create a constructive context for the discussion by focusing initially on their contributions. It builds a positive base for the discussion to follow.

2. What have been some important "lessons learned" from the past year?

This question assumes that the employee has actually learned some important things over the past year. One of the *Exceptional Team* differentiators in the learning culture and curiosity that exists on a high-performing team. This question asks the team member to reflect upon what they have learned, another telltale sign of an Exception Team.

These "lessons" can either be positive or negative. The team member chooses the direction

here and the leader should make sure not all the lessons are on the negative side. For example:

- "I learned that I am a little too ambitious about what I can realistically accomplish - need to get reality checks before I commit to something."

- "I am a much better project manager than I originally thought. My group got all our major projects done on time this quarter."

- "I really have to work on my conflict resolution skills. I have avoided some important conversations that needed resolution."

- "My team is full of hardworking, dedicated people. I feel blessed to be their leader."

- "My people want to see me more often. I get caught managing the technical side of things and don't walk around and talk with folks."

- "We need to do a better job at boundary management with other teams and work groups throughout the division. As this initiative picks up more steam, we will be interacting with a lot of others."

3. **What have been some challenges or difficulties you have encountered over the past year?**

This question assumes there have been some "difficulties" and that it is helpful to identify them. This is not meant to be critical of the team member or put them on the defensive. It is meant to begin to discuss some of the sensitive issues that need to be addressed. The S.D. is a holistic approach to supervision and deals with the good as well as the not so great. Both are needed if the supervisory process is going to have real integrity.

By posing the question, the team member has the choice and freedom to acknowledge that everything hasn't been "perfect". It is important that the team member not dodge it by saying something vague like, "There were a couple of glitches last year but nothing worth talking about". They are soft selling their challenges. The team leader should be ready with their prepared examples to provide more rigor to the discussion. (This question will be a diagnostic about how open and honest the team member really is about their shortcomings.)

4. **What are 1 – 2 areas of "needed development" you need to work on this year?** *(How will you enhance your effectiveness?)*

This question begins to move into a sensitive area because the team member must be willing to admit they actually do have some things that need improvement. If there isn't a level of trust and a positive relationship present, the team member will be reluctant to share this.

This is another reason the team leader prepares their answers to the questions. If the team member has some difficulty with this, the leader can then suggest some ideas and continue the dialogue.

We have found that most employees are all too willing to talk about their weaknesses and downplay their strengths. This is why you only ask for one or two areas of needed development, not seven or eight. If most people focus on improving one, possibly two areas, they will have done well.

What is important to pay attention to is *how* improving their areas of "needed development" will enhance their effectiveness as a team member. They must be clear about this because they need to believe it is well worth the time and effort to improve. They must understand the tangible benefits for improving.

For example:"By learning the Critical Path Planning software program, I will improve my overall project management skills and keep my unit's work on track" or "By improving my decision making skills, I will be better prepared for the upcoming project we will undertake next month."

5. **What are some things you would like to accomplish over the next 6 – 12 months?**
   (Please provide a rationale for each goal and a way to measure them)

It is important that the team member share what they believe they need to accomplish in order to contribute meaningfully to the team's goals. The fact that both parties have thought carefully about this question beforehand creates a "reality check" for the team member. If they go off on a tangent that really doesn't focus on the team's goals, the leader can provide some strong ideas about this. It is important to have a rationale that is well thought out because the team leader can diagnose the effectiveness and strategic nature of the member's thinking. The toughest element of this question is the *measurability* of the outcomes. Too often, individuals focus on activities (doing lots of things) and outputs rather than outcomes. For example:

■ I will accurately complete the monthly audit report on time (there is no "fuzziness" about this.)

■ I will reduce the number of customer complaints in my unit by 30% in the first half of the year. (Note, they didn't go for a high number like 90%. The 30% figure seems doable.)

■ I will reduce the office expenses (e.g. photocopying, telephones, computers, electricity) by 15% by the end of the year.

■ I will work with the Human Resources division and provide training in decision making for everyone in my unit. I will also work with H.R. to assess the effectiveness of my direct reports decision making skills throughout the year.

■ I will spearhead Project X and successfully complete it on time and under budget.

6. What education/training do you think you will need to be successful this upcoming year? *(Please be specific)*

At this stage, you have a great deal of helpful information regarding the learning and development needs of the team member. They will have discussed what they have learned, identified their areas of needed development and their future goals. This information creates a **Learning Agenda** for the team member. This "agenda" should focus both on their strengths and areas of needed development.

The team leader needs to solicit the member's ideas about their educational and learning needs.

For example: If a team member realizes they need help managing their time, selected courses should be identified and participation ensured. Other examples might include: Visiting other departments in the organization to learn about best practices, choosing a mentor to seek advice and wise counsel, receive coaching on a specific area of needed development, read an article about a specific topic to continue to build on a strength, attend a management/leadership program, write a paper on lessons learned about a particular project or take an assertiveness course.

Everyone on the team should have a "learning agenda" that they are working on throughout the next 6-12 months. Exceptional teams share their learning agenda with each other; this way everyone knows what others are working on. Having this information is helpful in several ways:

■ It communicates that everyone is focusing on improving, which becomes a team norm

■ It can create the opportunity for team members to help each other. If one team member is strong in an area where another member needs help, a natural support network can be created.

■ It creates a thoughtful risk taking opportunity for everyone. Sharing your agenda lets everyone know that you know what you need to work on. This shared risk tends to build a stronger team feeling.

7. How can I be supportive as your supervisor? *(e.g., spend more time with you, provide access to outside resources, provide more timely feedback)*

This question is important because it communicates to the team member that the leader is committed to their success and they want to be supportive. It is essential that the leader probe a little with this question because members might be reluctant to ask for help.

The leader can suggest ways they can be helpful:

- How would you like us to communicate over the next six months (face-to-face weekly meetings? a working lunch every month?)

- What should we agree to do if you encounter a problem or get stuck on a project? How can we be proactive when this happens?

- Can you identify any company hurdles (e.g., politics, resources, connections) that might get in the way of successfully completing your goals? How can I be helpful with them?

The key here is for the team leader to commit to *specific* support and follow through with them. This will build trust and credibility on the team leader/member relationship.

SUMMARY

Obviously, these suggestions will take time and attention to be effective. All of it is do-able if the organization has the will and discipline to do it right. In the end, supervision is about developing the capacity of the people in the organization, creating a learning agenda so people can enhance their skills, and holding people accountable to agreed upon, meaningful goals.

AI Events

LEADERSHIP

Explore professional development programs designed specifically for leaders in higher education. Get practical tools, resources, and discover your leadership potential through AI's leadership programming. The pace of change in higher education continues to accelerate and strong leadership is essential.

http://www.academicimpressions.com/areas-expertise/leadership

ACADEMIC IMPRESSIONS

REFERENCES

Anderson, PhD, Merrill C., Candice Frankovelgia, PsyD, and Gina Hernez-Broome, PhD. *Creating Coaching Cultures: What Business Leaders Expect and Strategies to Get There.* White Paper, Greensboro: Center for Creative Leadership, 2009.

Ashkenas, Ron, Mitchell Lee Marks, and Philip Mirvis. "Rebounding from Career Setbacks." Harvard Business Review: October 2014.

Brooks, A.W., F. Gino, and M.E. Schweitzer. "Smart People Ask for (My) Advice: Seeking Advice Boosts Perceptions of Competence." *Management Science* (forthcoming).

Canfield, Jack, and Peter Chee. *Coaching for Breakthrough Success: Proven Techniques for Making Impossible Dreams Possible*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2013.

Capretta, Cara, Lawrence Clark, and Guangrong Dai. "Executive Derailment: Three Cases in Point and How to Prevent It." *Global Business and Organizational Excellence* 27, no. 3 (March/April 2008): 48-56.

Charan, Ram. "Ending the CEO Succession Crisis." *Harvard Business Review,* February 2005.

Dotlich, David L., and Peter C. Cairo. *Why CEOs Fail: The 11 Behaviors That Can Derail Your Climb to the Top--and How to Manage Them*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003.

Dotlich, David and James L. Noel. *Action Learning: How the World's Top Companies are Re-Creating their Leaders and Themselves*. Jossey-Bass, 1998.

Fernandez-Araoz, Claudio, Boris Groysberg, and Nitin Nohria. "How to Hang on to Your High Potentials." *Harvard Business Review*, October 2011.

Fisher, Anne. "Starting a New Job? Don't Blow It." *Fortune*, March 7, 2005.

Furnham, Adrian, and John Taylor. *The Elephant in the Boardroom: The Causes of Leadership Derailment*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Gentry, William A. "Derailment: How Successful Leaders Avoid It." *Association for Talent Development*, January 25, 2011.

Gentry, William A. and L. R. Shanock. "Views of Managerial Derailment from Above & Below: The Importance of a Good Relationship with Upper Management and Putting People at Ease." *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 38: 2469-2494. 2008.

Goldsmith, Marshall, and Mark Reiter. *What Got You Here Won't Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successfu*l. New York: Hyperion, 2007.

Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. New York: Bantam Books, 2005.

—. Working with Emotional Intelligence. New York: Bantam Books, 2000.

Goleman, Daniel, Annie McKee, and Richard Boyatzis. *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002.

Goleman, Daniel, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee. *Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2013.

Goldsmith, Marshall. *What got you here won't get you there: how successful people become even more successful!* New York: Hyperion, 2007.

Heifetz, Ronald A., and Martin Linsky. *Leadership on the line: staying alive through the dangers of leading*. Boston, Mass: Harvard Business School Press, 2002.

Hernez-Broome, Gina, and Richard L. Hughes. "Leadership Development: Past, Present, and Future." *Human Resource Planning*, 2004: 24-32.

Hogan, Joyce, Robert Hogan, and Robert B. Kaiser. "Management Derailment." *American Psychological Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 3. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. 555-575.

Hughes, Richard, Robert Ginnett, and Gordon Curphy. *Leadership: Enhancing the Lessons of Experience*. New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin, 2011.

Inyang, Benjamin James. "Exploring the Concept of Leadership Derailment: Defining New Research Agenda." *International Journal of Business and Management* 8, no. 16 (2013): 78-85.

Irwin PhD, Tim. *Derailed: Five Lessons Learned from Catastrophic Failures of Leadership*. Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 2012.

Kaiser, Robert B. *The Perils of Accentuating the Positive*. Amsterdam : Hogan Press, 2009.

Kaplan, Robert E., and Robert B. Kaiser. *Fear Your Strengths: What You Are Best at Could Be Your Biggest Problem*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2103.

Linsky, Martin, and Ronald A. Heifetz. *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2002.

Lombardo, Michael M., and Robert W. Eichinger. *Preventing Derailment: What to Do Before It's Too Late*. Greensboro: Center for Creative Leadership, 1989.

—. *The Leadership Machine: Architecture to Develop Leaders for Any Future*. Minneapolis: Lominger Ltd Inc., 2000.

Marks, Mitchell Lee, Philip Mirvis, and Ron Ashkenas. "Rebounding from Career Setbacks."
        Harvard Business Review, October 2014.

McCall, Morgan W., and Michael M. Lombardo. *Off the Track: Why and How Successful
        Executives Get Derailed*. Technical Report, Greensboro: Center for Creative
        Leadership, 1983.

McCauley, Cynthia D., D. Scott Derue, Paul R. Yost, and Sylvester Taylor. *Experience-
        Driven Leader Development: Models, Tools, Best Practices and Advice for On-the-
        Job Development*. John Wiley, 2010.

McCauley, Cynthia and Michael M. Lombardo. "Benchmarks: An Instrument for Diagnosing
        Managerial Strengths and Weaknesses." *Measures of Leadership*. K. E. Clark and M.
        B. Clark, eds. Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership, 1990: 535-545.

Moxley, R. S. and Wilson O'Connor. "A Systems Approach to Leadership Development."
        The Center for Creative Leadership Handbook of Leadership Development. C.
        D. McCauley, R. S. Moxley and E. Van Velsor, eds. Jossey-Bass: 1998.

Ready, Douglas A. "Is Your Company Failing Its Leaders?" *Business Strategy Review* 16,
        no. 4 (2005): 21-25.

Sanaghan, Patrick. *5 Secrets to Developing a High-Performing Team in Higher Education*.
        Denver: Academic Impressions, 2014.

Sanaghan, Patrick and Kimberly Eberbach. *Creating the Exceptional Team: A Practitioner's
        Guide*. Amherst: H R D Press, 2014.

Sanaghan, Patrick, Larry Goldstein, Kathleen D. Gaval, and Stephen Joel Trachtenberg.
        Presidential Transitions: it's Not Just the Position, it's the Transition. Lanham,
        Md: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2009.

Sanaghan, Patrick, and Susan Jurow. 2011. "Who Will Step Into Your Shoes?" Business
        Officer. 44, 10 (2011): 16-24.

Trotta, Melissa K. "Growing our own: The institutional and individual value of an on-campus leadership development program for higher educational administrators." Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania. 2014.

Weinstock, Beth and Mary Ellen Smith Glasgow. "Executive Coaching to Support Doctoral Role Transitions and Promote Leadership Consciousness." *Role development for doctoral advanced nursing practice*. Springer Publishing Company, 2010.

Weinstock, Beth. "The Benefits of a Leadership Program and Executive Coaching for New Nursing Administrators: One College's Experience." Journal of Professional Nursing. 2009.

Weinzimmer, Lawrence G. and Jim McConnoughy. *The Wisdom of Failure: How to Learn the Tough Leadership Lessons without Paying the Price*. Jossey-Bass, 2012.

Wood Brooks, Alison, Francesca Gino, and Maurice E. Schweitzer. *Smart People Ask for (My) Advice: Seeking Advice Boosts Perceptions of Competence*. Working Paper, Boston: Harvard Business School Working Papers, 2014.

Zaccaro, Stephen J. *The Nature of Executive Leadership: A Conceptual and Empirical Analysis of Success*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2001.

Zenger, John and Joseph Folkman. "Ten fatal flaws that derail leaders." Harvard Business Review, 2009.

—. *The Extraordinary Leader: Turning Good Managers into Great Leaders*. McGraw Hill, 2009.