



How to Overhaul Leadership

Are you being held accountable to "[drive for results](#)" and "[motivate people](#)?" If so, consider joining the resistance. If you are in HR, you need to lead the [resistance](#).

Now is the time to rethink what constitutes good leadership -- and overhauling obsolete competencies in leadership performance plans is the right place to start.

A [survey](#) of books and websites guiding management strategy cited six leadership theories that most influence the leadership competencies you are being held accountable for demonstrating. The sad truth: these top-down theories harken from 1841 through 1972, many derived from Henri Fayol's 14 command-and-control principles of management established in 1916 and popularized in the 1950s.

We've come too far in our understanding of human nature to be captive to these antiquated leader-centric perceptions of leadership.

Your leadership conundrum

Do these competencies look familiar?

You are expected to drive for results:

- Can be counted on to exceed goals successfully
- Is constantly and consistently one of the top performers
- Very bottom-line oriented
- Steadfastly pushes self and others for results
- Shows determination to achieve goals over time
- Resists any pressure to be deflected from this attainment

At the same time, you are called on to motivate people:

- Creates a climate in which people want to do their best
- Can motivate many kinds of direct reports and team or project members
- Can assess each person's hot button and use it to get the best out of him/her
- Pushes tasks and decisions down
- Empowers others
- Invites input from each person and shares ownership and visibility

- Makes each individual feel his/her work is important
- Is someone people like working for and with

Talk about a challenging conundrum!

On the one hand, driving for results demands you focus on outcomes, determination, and pushing yourself and others. On the other hand, motivating people makes the erroneous assumption that you can motivate people by pushing their hot buttons. (Notice a lot of "pushing?")

And, without appreciation for contemporary motivation science, you will default to traditional methods of motivation that have proved ineffective or outright harmful.

Driving for results and motivating others asks you to marshal opposing forces.

If you think you're confused, imagine how your staff feels.

3 new competencies

Productivity is important. Results are essential. But driving people, focusing on outcomes and pushing hot buttons will not yield productivity or results. Especially in today's environment. (Even if you achieve short-term gains, you suffer opportunity loss.)

You're more likely to get the results you need when you focus on the needs of the people delivering the results.

Suppose your leadership promotes people's sense of choice, connection and competence. In that case, you will unleash the positive energy they need to meet the pandemic's challenges, be resilient, experience well-being and thrive. People who thrive also optimize productivity, achieve their goals and fuel employee work passion.

Based on [Self-Determination Theory](#), these three robust competencies are just what the doctor ordered for meeting today's leadership challenges.

1. Encourage choice

Autonomy-supportive leadership helps people perceive that they have choices, a sense of control and are the source of their actions.

To encourage choice, stop applying pressure, demanding accountability and incentivizing or manipulating behavior and begin to:

- Use noncontrolling language that invites a perception of choice

- Illuminate boundaries, then explore options within those boundaries
- Collaboratively set goals and present timelines as valuable information necessary for achieving agreed-upon outcomes

Today's pandemic environment demands strict adherence to rules, regulations and processes. But the way you communicate these limitations determines whether a person feels autonomous or controlled. The greater their sense of autonomy, the more likely they are to adhere to safety protocols and other demands.

2. Deepen connection

You have an incredible opportunity now and post-pandemic to help people feel cared about and (even more importantly) to care about others despite social distancing and working virtually. Your leadership can make all the difference in helping people grasp how their work and actions contribute to the welfare of the whole -- and to something greater than themselves.

To deepen connection, stop focusing on metrics without meaning, driving for results without awareness of their personal concerns and pushing outcomes without regard for interpersonal relationships and begin to:

- Demonstrate empathy and caring through listening, acknowledging and accepting expressions of negative emotion
- Provide transparency by sharing a rationale for goals, sharing information about yourself and the organization and discuss your intentions openly
- Align work with cherished values and a noble sense of purpose

If you want to deepen connection at work, let go of a common belief among leaders that "it's not personal, it's just business" and embrace the idea that "if it's business, it's personal."

3. Build competence

Are you a good teacher? If not, you may need to delegate training and development. You cannot consider yourself an effective leader if your people don't feel effective at meeting everyday challenges and opportunities, can't demonstrate progress on mastering essential skills over time and don't value growth and learning.

To build competence in people, stop discounting training, punishing mistakes and focusing on results over effort and begin to

Emphasize learning goals, not just performance goals,

Instead of asking, "What did you accomplish today?" ask, "What did you learn today?"

[Flip the feedback](#): Establish a new norm where people regularly solicit input rather than waiting for you to provide crucial feedback

Building people's competence is one of the most potent tools you have for lifting people burdened with high levels of uncertainty and inexperience for dealing with radical disruptions in their work and personal life.

Join the resistance against archaic and disproven leadership theories that are driving your leadership in the wrong direction with unintended consequences. Try adopting three new competencies to promote people's sense of choice, connection and competence.

Experience more significant results when you eliminate "drive for results" and "motivate people" from your performance plan and enjoy the intended consequences as people thrive and flourish.

(For an in-depth exploration of leadership competencies and research citations, see my peer-reviewed journal [article](#) "Toward a New Curriculum of Leadership Competencies: Advances in Motivation Science Call for Rethinking Leadership Development.")

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