TOP TEN LEADERSHIP SKILLS LIST

To be an extraordinary leader, you have to build trust and spark within your employees. When you build trust and spark together, amazing things happen. You attract and retain the most talented employees. You innovate constantly. You surprise and delight your customers. You out-perform your peers. When trust and spark work together, the culture shifts to one in which people focus on the performance of the entire organization.

To build trust and spark, you need to instill ten habits in the way you think, act, and orient yourself as a leader. This tool explains the ten skills that define extraordinary leaders.

1. Align the Core Values
2. Sharpen the Focus
3. Lead Through Others
4. Manage Decisions Well
5. Accelerate the Pace of Change
6. Stimulate the Creative Flow
7. Spread Systems Thinking
8. Communicate in 12-D
9. Start With Yourself
10. Help People Assume Responsibility

Skill #1 - Align the Core Values

- Do you communicate clearly and consistently the organization's core values (what is essential for its success)?
- Do you make sure there are measures of success tied to the core values?

Every person has a set of core values. You have yours, I have mine. Sometimes these are in conflict. To make things more complex, every culture has a set of core values. In an increasingly globalized world, with increasingly diverse workplaces, this means there are more and more opportunities for core values to collide. The first skill is to recognize the importance of aligning everyone around a single set of core values - the organization's core values - defined as the behaviors and activities essential to the organization's success. This is a significant departure from the traditional ways of thinking about core values. It is the leader's job to discover these core values and make them apparent to all. By doing so, you begin to instill deep feelings of trust, ownership and mutual accountability.

Skill #2 - Sharpen the Focus

- Do you communicate clearly and consistently the vision for the organization (where it is going)?
- Does the vision communicate a sharp sense of focus and priorities?
- Do you make sure there are measures of success tied to the vision?

It is not enough to identify and communicate the organization's core values. People want to know the specific vision: What is the company actually going to do in the future to

improve how it delivers value? People want to know how to measure success in getting there. Defining a focused direction is not easy. It requires difficult, sometimes painful choices. But a sharp strategic focus will build trust and generate spark. And research has shown that the more focused the vision is, the more people will dedicate themselves to achieving it.

Skill #3 - Lead Through Others

- Do you make sure that talented people are recruited, placed in the right roles, and developed?
- Do you build effective teams?
- Do you manage effective meetings?
- Do you delegate effectively?
- Do you develop "operating principles" for people that enable them to work well together?

To maximize your impact, you have to lead through others. For the leader, it is critical to recruit and hire the right players, delegate responsibility to them, and provide them with the tools and systems to succeed. It also means getting rid of players who fail to adapt successfully. In a light speed world, each player on the court needs to elevate the others. Understanding the habits of highly effective teams is critical. As a leader, you have to watch the dynamics carefully, bench the players who are not advancing, and give those who are ready to play a chance at a starting role.

Skill #4 - Manage Decisions Well

- Do you understand the five types of decision processes?
- Do you communicate the process surrounding a given decision in such a way that everyone is clear on their roles and expectations?

Decisions are the day-to-day inputs and outputs of an organization. To operate at light speed, leaders must build systems that result in good decisions being made throughout the organization. They need to teach people how to manage decisions within the confines of the core values and vision. They need to reframe how difficult decisions are communicated and made. Delegations must be clear. Otherwise, the sludge of bureaucracy creeps in and paralyzes the organization.

Skill #5 - Accelerate the Pace of Change

- Do you build processes to share performance information and improve the performance of the organization?
- Do you engage people in continuous improvement and learning?
- Do you manage change effectively?

In a time of accelerating change, leaders need to enable people to adapt quickly by introducing "learning loops" throughout the organization. Successful learning loops have three qualities: They are based on clear metrics and targets; they are monitored on a regular basis by groups empowered to make change; and the communication is immediate. Effective leaders not only arm people with the skills and tools to continuously

learn, adapt and navigate change effectively, they also weed out hidden "ignorance loops" that impede the organization from learning. *(See our tool: "How to Build Effective Learning Loops")*

Skill #6 - Stimulate the Creative Flow

- Do you create an environment in which innovation flourishes?
- Do you drive out fear of failure?
- Do you reward people for creativity and innovation?
- Do you search out people's particular strengths?
- Do you give people opportunities to display their strengths and experience creative flow?

Many organizations are ruled by hidden forces of fear - fear of failure, fear of personal embarrassment, fear of loss of status. Leaders must continually counter this tendency by rewarding people for taking chances and being different. They need to tap into and release people's creative flow. They need to weed out "group think." When people feel supported to take creative risks, they'll discover and tap hidden wells of talent and energy. They'll apply creative thinking to problem solving and achieve significant breakthroughs in remarkably short periods of time. When you enable people to stretch beyond their safety zones, you can inspire them to feel differently and to think differently. This builds high levels of trust and spark - and leads to high levels of innovation.

Skill #7 - Spread Systems Thinking

- Do you encourage people to use a systems approach to solving problems?
- Are you data-driven in your approach to solving problems?
- Do you help people overcome the assumption of competence?
- Do you help people avoid the substitution fallacy?

To succeed in a light speed world, leaders need to spread the power of systems thinking throughout the organization. It's not sufficient if just a few people understand systems thinking. Everyone needs to know how to view problems from a systems perspective. People need to become data-driven in their thinking. They need to visualize the organization from multiple frames of reference. People need to continually challenge the status quo and adjust business processes based on customers' expectations, not internal assumptions or traditions. By spreading the power of systems thinking, leaders can instill deeper levels of trust, innovation and performance throughout the organization.

Skill #8 - Communicate in 12-D

- Do you communicate well internally, up, down and across the organization?
- Do you communicate well with customers, shareholders, regulators, suppliers, and other interest groups?
- Do you have a message box?
- Do you mobilize new media as well as old media effectively?

In a light speed world, people need to communicate at increasing speeds (and at increasing distances) in order to build trust. Internally, this means a focus from the top on building systems of communication. It also means focusing on external communication. In a light speed world, people on the outside scrutinize and analyze every action that the company takes. There is constant pressure from the media. New websites, blogs, and watchdog groups crop up every day, fueling more feedback and "e-chatter." Since there is no "under the radar" anymore, leaders need to invent new ways to communicate and shape the rules of the game.

Skill #9 - Start With Yourself

- Do you set a high standard for personal and professional integrity - and hold other people accountable to a high standard?
- Specifically, do you display high levels of passion for the organization, honesty and honor, humor, and humility?
- Can you communicate effectively, using all four "powers" of communication?

Leaders need to develop certain personal qualities in order to succeed in a light speed world. They need to be honorable, have a passion for what they do, display a well-rounded sense of humor, and stay humble and curious to learn. In addition, they need to become master communicators and adept at dealing with four paradoxes of leadership. All of these qualities can be learned. When blended together, these are the personal qualities that distinguish great leaders.

Skill #10 - Help People Assume Responsibility

- Are you able to alter your own behaviors to achieve higher levels of performance?
- Are you able to ask powerful questions that enable other people to assume responsibility and perform as effective leaders in the organization?

Leaders must master this last skill in order to help themselves - and other people - assume responsibility for change. Change invariably means making a personal choice. Given that fact, leaders must rethink how they communicate: Rather than direct people, they must learn to ask powerful questions. "What is the change you need to make?" "How will you know you've achieved it?" "How will you approach it?" "What are the ways you'll measure your success?" By asking powerful questions, leaders can harness the power of self-reflection and help people assume full responsibility to implement these practices and make the jump to light speed.