the **cooper** group

STRATEGY

MANDATE FOR SUCCESS: BEALEADER WHO CREATES MORE LEADERS

R E VIVAL E D I T I O N



Are You global and the stress of the stress

by David Cooper

et's start here, and this shouldn't take long to answer: Who are the superiors you have most admired during your career? I'll wager they're the ones who handed you the reins. As exciting, gratifying, scary or painful as it may have been at times, they're the ones who empowered you to take ownership and charge ahead. They trusted you and were there to listen and advocate.

If you served (and thrived) under standout professionals like that, lucky you. A leader can be a boss, but not every boss is a leader, at least not yet. Most professionals begin their journeys as bosses and over time develop effective leadership skills. They do it by wisely choosing to champion people and the tools people need to do well in their jobs. It's a winwin choice. Are you a higher-up your people want and need, who your organization also needs to succeed? Or is management your aim? To be sure, being a real leader doesn't require having direct reports. Each team member is an influence on the team or organization, for better or worse.

The Overarching Secret to Great Leadership

There is a wealth of wisdom and resources on how to effectively lead, so there are no hidden secrets. There is, however, a distinct mindset that distinguishes leaders from bosses.

• Leaders focus on people and processes. They drive positive outcomes by concentrating on galvanizing and strengthening both people and processes to be the best they can be. In other words, their modus operandi prioritizes who and what really makes things happen from day to day.

Bosses focus only on outcomes. It may be an oblivious oversight and lack of experience, but this weakens the pipeline to desired outcomes. Apathy, dissatisfaction and turnover are rampant under these bosses, and deficient processes kill efficiency and productivity.

Real leadership is a different frame of mind. Contrary to what some think, changing mindsets from boss to leader does not mean reaching so far in a new direction that it pulls shoulders out of sockets and balls get dropped. Instead, adopting a mindset that champions people and processes is a refreshing 'outlook,' one that it is liberating to bosses, direct reports and teams alike. It breeds enthusiasm and shared goals, and gives people a greater sense of purpose.

Think of this as an awakening – and then become a sponge like every great leader in history who sought knowledge on how to motivate, inspire and unleash untapped potential in others.

Get Behind Your People. Literally.

As a management consultant, I believe in operating and making decisions based on data, analytics and facts. I also know that metrics and intelligence alone do not drive success. People do. And people only excel when armed with facts, strategy – and confidence from superiors.

"A leader...is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go out ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they are being directed from behind." --Nelson Mandela

Linda Hill, a long-time advocate of leading from behind, believes this is an essential skill for effectual leadership. As the Wallace Brett Donham Professor of Business Administration at the Harvard Business School, and chair of the Leadership Initiative, she is regarded as a foremost expert on leadership and innovation. She shared the following with Harvard Business Review:

"This image of the shepherd behind his flock is an acknowledgment that leadership is a collective activity in which different people at different times – depending on their strengths, or 'nimbleness' – come forward to move the group in the direction it needs to go. The metaphor also hints at the agility of a group that doesn't have to wait for and then respond to a command from the front. That kind of agility is more likely to be developed by a group when a leader conceives of her role as creating the opportunity for collective leadership, as opposed to merely setting direction."

Agile, Collective Leadership Is the Way of the Future

The enablement of others has for decades been a venerated approach to leadership by giants across business, consultancy and literary landscapes. Their battle cry, the timeless sonar for navigating volatile environments, has never been more pertinent than it is right now, as companies negotiate the most challenging business climate in more than a century.

Bill Gates:

"As we look ahead into the next century, leaders will be those who empower others."

Tom Peters:

"Leaders don't create followers; they create more leaders."

E.M. Kelly:

"Remember the difference between a boss and a leader: A boss says 'Go!' A leader says 'Let's go!'"

True empowerment pays it forward, as described by bestselling author Beth Revis... "A leader is someone willing to give his strength to others that they may have the strength to stand on their own."

Four Clear Distinctions. Which One Are You?

Boss or leader? Without doubt, great leadership is what will move companies through this unpredictable era. From Business News Daily, here are four concise <u>distinctions</u> to keep in mind and put into practice on the continuous journey to becoming a more effective leader:

- **1.** Bosses command; leaders influence.
- 2. Bosses discipline; leaders mentor.
- **3.** Bosses delegate tasks; leaders delegate authority.
- **4.** Bosses are above the team; leaders are part of the team.

Immerse yourself in learning more about real leadership and encourage your people to do the same. In the coming months and years, you're going to need strong, capable hands on deck.

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LIKE YOUR CAREER DEPENDS ON IT

by David Cooper

There are loads of companies out there revving their engines, operating with great vigor and optimism – only to find they are consistently behind in revenue goals or off track in their approach to the market. What makes their wheels come off?



and be supportive when they do. The example you set will equalize the behavior of non-inclusive leaders.

2. Have the grit to challenge preferences.

We all have biases. It's part of the human condition. But personal preferences create big messes for humans when trying to coalesce around planning and executing strategy. Personal biases must be

Self-suppression is usually the root cause. In current business cultures, leaders are rewarding people who blindly support them, and in doing so, they excommunicate independent thinkers who can help steer clear of strategic misses and tactical failures. You might recognize their leadership style: Survival over contribution. Following over leading. Compliance over conflict.

For the sake of your career, pull ahead of that noise. Real thinkers are the new outliers in today's hyper-competitive business environment, and here's why.

Suppression Kills Traction

Organizations do need solidarity to succeed, but under insular leadership, harmony is never about the integration of ideas and experiences. It is about forcing adaptation to existing frameworks and operating cultures.

Entrepreneurial thinking is the new fuel. The only difference between an entrepreneur and entrepreneurial thinking is that one owns the business and the other stimulates business. One cannot survive without the other. Neither can your company. To improve

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their trajectory and yours, be an entrepreneur and vocal contributor.

Dare to Be Disruptive

In these unprecedented times, companies simply must take unusual and often unprecedented approaches to operations and the market. Here are eight ways you can challenge the establishment and blaze a trail of future success.

1. Champion alternative points of view.

Be someone who knows your customers inside out, studies challenges and opportunities, observes how other industry players operate, and how your company might do things differently to fill gaps in the market. Be unreserved but thoughtful in bringing different perspectives to the table. Encourage others to do the same obliterated to get ahead. Be aware of your own and those of others. Prompt yourself and everyone else to check predilections at the door of the professional realm. It's the only way to embrace new thinking, make faster and brighter decisions, and create better outcomes.

3. Collaborate with other real thinkers.

"It takes two flints to make a fire." Louisa May Alcott's idiom illustrates how to infuse heat beneath your career and keep it roaring. Deliberately seek interactions with other game changers. Catch up with your broader network and those on the periphery. Dialogue sparks inspiration. At work, invite other strong voices to the table. Seize opportunities to work with cross-functional or multi-disciplinary teams to leverage diverse ideas and strengths. It's important to note that as you go, if you're not having fun, you're doing something wrong!

4. Seek truth: Always question assumptions, including your own.

Remember how this started? The way it has always been is no longer the way forward. Take heed from Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison: "In fact, the only way to get ahead is to find errors in conventional wisdom." How do you do that? One way is to play devil's advocate – but with tact and diplomacy, great, deficiency into surplus, and red into black.

6. Avoid groupthink.

This <u>article</u> in Psychology Today explains why groupthink is so destructive. Here's an excerpt: "Groupthink occurs when a group of well-intentioned people make irrational or non-optimal decisions spurred by the urge to conform or the discouragement of dissent. This problematic or premature consensus may be fueled by a particular agenda or simply because group members value

Ask "what if" when things are going great because this is what innovation is made of! By getting different views on a project or problem, you will turn average into great, deficiency into surplus, and red into black.

meaning challenge norms, not people. Here's a great primer from Business News Daily on how to <u>Speak up! Dissension Is Key to</u> <u>Successful Teamwork.</u>

5. Always ask, "What if?"

If we know one thing about business, it's that there is always a better way. At some point in the planning process, you have to go with what you have, but it dooms an initiative to leave visible stones unturned. The result? "If only we had done this or that." Don't wait until you're stuck or doing a postmortem on a failed project. Ask "what if" when things are going great because this is what innovation is made of! By getting different views on a project or problem, you will turn average into harmony and coherence above rational thinking."

This is why thinkers are the new outliers in business today. Brainstorming, by yourself or with a group, is compulsory to generating ideas and solving problems. Always remember there are no bad ideas! Only the suppression of thought.

7. Don't let disagreement and disillusionment hinder you.

Being an advocate for change can be a painful journey. In an environment that tries to silence independent thinking and even in a more tolerant place, people by nature can be averse to change. Just know that disagreement and antipathy are not the same as rejection. If you're getting a reaction, it means you're creating dialogue, engaging people – and this is the first step toward affecting change. Adopt the mindset that your idea might hit some barriers, but that you will find a way to succeed.

8. Demystify failure.

Failure is a misunderstood and anxiety-inducing word for agents of change. You can strip its power by deciding for yourself what failure is and isn't. Is it a setback? Is it botching the presentation of a great concept? Is it having your idea die on the table or watching your solution fall short of expectations? None of those are disasters. Not even close.

Here's the thing. Thought leadership is about new directions, and risks and rocky starts are inherent to the process. While these unpleasant likelihoods should neither be anticipated nor avoided, fear of failure is why people give up – and that right there is the very definition of failure.

Give Voice to Your Inner Entrepreneur

Bold thinking and willingness to take risks are the essence and verve of today's successful companies. Minds like yours are in demand all over corporate America, to propel teams, drive new products and services, attract top talent and successfully scale the business.

As management consultant icon Peter F. Drucker said, "There is the risk you cannot afford to take, and there is the risk you cannot afford not to take."

Embrace risk. Be disruptive. Think out loud like your career depends on it – because it does.

by David Cooper



Humility: The Missing State of Mind

f your business or job function exposes you to leaders at other organizations, you have a sense of who is effective, or not, in running those companies. You have the same sense about leaders within your own company, anyone from your managers to your executives.

What you may not know is exactly why some professionals excel in management and others do not. Often, success boils down to humility – which is right up there with honesty, integrity, vision and courage on the list of must-have traits for great business leaders.

Without it, things are rarely optimal for a leader, their direct reports and initiatives to reach full potential.

Being Humble in Business Is a Strength, Not a Weakness

You recognize unpretentious, down-to-earth people in your

professional life. They're the people around whom you feel most comfortable, welcome, inspired and nonthreatened. They're the ones you are happy to engage and most inclined to support. It's because you regard them as open, fair and trustworthy – magnetic qualities. In your book, they are good eggs.

But do they make strong business leaders? Yes they do, when they possess this along with other requisite traits. Here's how to view humble people in a formidable light:

■ Never mistake humility for weakness. The most influential and effective people I know in business, in fact the best leaders we've had in government and society are humble human beings at heart, both personally and professionally. Think about powerful figures and well-managed firms you admire most, and why. I bet they're coalition builders, good at corralling others to make things happen. People gravitate toward them, want to work with or for them.

■ Humility should not be confused with management style. There are many excellent leaders out there who, while they may be humble creatures, are not perfect humans. Some are overly demanding, hardcore productivity drivers. Some have a short fuse. Some are loud and rambunctious, while others are soft-spoken and methodical. Regardless of management style, their humanity shines through. Trust in them reigns supreme.

Humility is one of the essential soft skills. And this is another perception to avoid: "Soft" skills are not casual, not expendable and should never be overlooked or undervalued in a leader. They represent the abilities to listen, communicate, collaborate, build relationships, resolve conflict and solve problems. Who can effectively lead others without these skills?

■ Humility is never, ever wielded as a power tool. Genuine humility is modest and unassuming. It is not used to manipulate, score points or win favor. What we love about humble people is their propensity to engage us on equal ground, not from a place of personal superiority. Their modus operandi is pure and unadulterated, focused on working together to create results, and for everyone to benefit personally and professionally.

How Is This Vital Trait Demonstrated?

Exercising humility is simple in relation to its enormous payoff. Humble leaders always give credit where credit is due. They encourage and welcome feedback on their ideas, plans and actions. They own their mistakes and are committed to self-improvement. And they make it a priority to help others succeed, from team members to customers and business partners.

The results? When it is authentic and reliable, this honorable way of operating sets a tone of transparency, understanding and individual accountability that is hugely motivating to other people. Best of all, it fosters reciprocal behavior from teams and constituents. In other words, exercising humility creates an internal culture and external dynamic in which people get the most and best from each other. It's one of the ways companies improve, thrive and win.

It's Not to the Exclusion of Other Key Traits

The biggest reason being humble is

frowned on by some professionals and companies is because it is viewed as being soft and a competitive risk. This could not be further from the truth. This trait's value in business is documented in peer reviewed research – and the lack of it has been illustrated by leaders and companies that have been the subject of public scandals.

In his bestselling book Good

to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't, author Jim Collins explains that the best leaders display a combination of humility and fierce resolve, the latter being a combination

of other traits of great leaders.

In other words, it is both possible and imperative that leaders are firm, focused, visionary, courageous and confident – and practice humility in the process. How these traits are balanced varies, based on the hierarchy of authority in the company and what employees want and expect from their superiors. But human nature being what it is, most employees will always want to feel valued and included. Humility fulfills that fundamental need.

Practice, Recognize and Reward It

When your company leadership places a priority on demonstrating genuine acts of humility, you will recognize the best candidates for promotion when you have critical roles to fill. They're the ones whose humility and fierce resolve are successful in motivating others. When you move them up, you see positive change across your culture and operations.

This trait encourages innovative thought, eliciting ideas and contributions from team members. Your teams and company grow stronger and more focused as a result. An inclusive culture also emanates outward to customers,



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business partners and the communities in which you do business. It is indeed a positive reflection that increases value and respect for your brand.

To achieve your full potential, let humility be present – not a missing state of mind.

How to Reinforce Your Brand: Be the

s a business and brand strategist, I dig deep into corporate values, operating philosophies, and other tenets to unearth the naked soul of a brand – the core of who they are, what they do, and why. One might think that after excavating and grasping that soul, I'd have all the malleable gold

you, kid. Whether or not your company and superiors know it, if you are a 'glue' person, you are the good thing your company must have to be solid, steady and poised for growth, especially in these challenging times.

Here's how to recognize and ramp up your glue factor to help

> strengthen your team and brand.

Indispensable **Supports Are Often Unseen**

In daily business, across every industry and functionality, there are people in mission-essential roles who work persistently and indefatigably to get things done. In the process, they also manage to

nurture their peers and keep morale high among the

ranks. They don't hold executive or management titles. They're not the superstars. In fact, they are often unnoticed and underappreciated, even forgotten.

Glue!

Who are these silent warriors? Much like concealed I-beams that provide load-bearing support for large structures, these people are the super glue that holds things together inside a company. They are forever in pursuit of efficiency, never the limelight. What fires them up is cultivating people and processes, and being a go-to person, never sucking the life out of valuable resources. The only reward they seek is a job well done, never credit or recognition.

Contributors are who they are and what they do, and thank goodness they exist. Organizations succeed or fail every day based on how securely bonded and airtight they are at the seams.



needed in the palm of my hand to cast the company's prosperous road ahead. Not quite.

Want to know where the real goldmine lies? Here's looking at

Motivational

They keep other essential employees and systems in constant forward motion. They give teams a sense of purpose by genially urging people toward the ultimate goal. Along the way, they identify and institute better processes and procedures, create solutions to challenges, anticipate risks, and protect teams and brands by thwarting errors and issues before problems have a chance to unfold.

People-Centric

Glue people are wonderful coworkers, communicators and supporters. Their interpersonal skills also make them great assets in external-facing roles. While the value of their traits is intangible and therefore sometimes difficult to measure, their absence is sorely felt when they are not involved in a project or issue at hand.

Authentic Glue people ha

Glue people have absolutely no use for hype or double talk. They think and deal in reality, knowing that transparency, integrity, trust and empathy are far more impactful and valuable to themselves, their teams, the brand, customers and business partners.

GREAT QUALITIES OF GLUE PEOPLE



What a revered trait in life and business! Personal achievements and status do not occupy the minds of glue people. Humility, people and results do. Their unpretentious natures calm colleagues, increase dialogue and idea sharing, break barriers to understanding, disarm conflict, and set a compassionate tone for teams to jointly navigate the ups and downs of daily operations.

Collaborative

Corporate culture creates a competitive environment that is supposed to motivate people to become better at what they do. However, this result is often inhibited by professional jealousies or insecurities, and intentionally or not. closing people out of the loop. At heart, glue people are collaborators and devout brand stewards. They love and prioritize sharing, and helping others succeed. Notably, they understand the reciprocal value of exchanging knowledge and ideas - and they positively thrive on it. Same team mentality!

It Sticks to You and Your Brand – In a Good Way

If being the glue sounds like a selfless and thankless endeavor, on the surface you're right – but you're looking at it all wrong. As mentioned, after decades of digging into corporate cultures, I have seen time and again that human glue is the real goldmine beneath strong and resilient brands. In these times, it may actually make the difference between survival and extinction.

What's fascinating, although not surprising, is that glue people don't know they're indispensable. They don't realize that teams and companies cannot operate as well without them. Humility has neither the time nor inclination to entertain such awareness, but their golden cloaks stick to them, nonetheless. What ends up happening is that brands and careers flourish. The above characteristics make these team players essential to the mission.

If you don't know this about yourself, just ask a trusted coworker. I promise you they know. They are better because of you.

Recognize and Unleash Your Bainmakers! by David Cooper

n today's environment, crossfunctional and creative use of employees can be a means of survival and a quick way to fill talent gaps. It can also be the answer to operating with agility and keeping talented employees from leaving for parts unknown.

Most companies have untapped potential on staff – people with abilities and interests beyond their designated roles. And companies certainly have operational holes to fill with so many new needs and processes imposed by the pandemic. Many of these will become permanent.

Agility, innovation and higher revenue are going to spring from progressive use of untapped human potential. What does it take to cash in? Companies must rethink, shake up and awaken their talent management ecosystems by infusing operations with better ways to get things done.

Flexibility Has Become Essential

In short, it's time to relax longstanding and restrictive job descriptions, those tight parameters that keep people tethered to a finite realm of responsibility. Loosen up! In our fast-changing climate, squandering valuable human capital is tragic. Instead of sticking with the status quo, consider shaping jobs around people and the evolving needs of the business and customers.

The same is true in the hiring process. Going forward, hire for aptitude and ability, and ease off of conformance with strict requirements. It is a wasted opportunity when the lack of a certain degree or certification excludes an extremely talented and promising candidate. I echo Ralph Marston of The Daily Motivator in saying that "Excellence is not a skill. It's an attitude." Indeed!

All of this brings an entirely new meaning to "you get what you pay for." Make sure you do! Today, you need everything your employees have to offer. And in turn, your people want and need to grow, to better themselves. Unleash your rainmakers by putting their talents to work in new ways. Your company, employees and customers will be much better for it.

It's Already Happening With Remarkable and Measurable Results

Like most companies, yours has probably discovered operational deficiencies that did not exist before the pandemic. For example, who is managing the influx of customer and employee phone calls, emails, questions and fulfillment logistics as a result of COVID-19?

Some employees may be strained in trying to manage it all. Why let them struggle and allow service to lag when you may have employees who are equally or better suited to shoulder new demands on your organization?

Spread it around. Great examples of reimagining how work gets done are cited in <u>Harvard Business Review</u>: "Many organizations, such as Allianz Global Investors and Cisco, have set up internal project marketplaces that break down work into tasks and projects that can be matched with people from anywhere in the organization with relevant skills and availability."

Companies large and small can benefit from such a practice. You don't need to call it a marketplace or for that matter, establish official guidelines. Simply identify where more support is needed and open your full spigot of talent to reinforce those areas. You will be surprised by the interest among your staff and the speed at which you can close talent gaps.

Who Has Hidden Talents? You Never Know Until You Ask.

You could certainly approach employees you think are the best candidates to take on expanded responsibilities. But limiting the scope to your own perceptions is restrictive. It defeats the purpose and value of finding hidden talents on your team. The best employees get passed over for new opportunities every day due to this limited approach to delegating responsibility.

Instead, describe a need or task among all employees and let those interested crawl out of the woodwork and come to you. Let them know you're not asking them to assume new jobs. Rather, you're inviting them to support the entire organization by lending their skills and interests to tasks outside their normal job functions – including tasks with no relation to their current jobs.



Today, you need everything your employees have to offer. And in turn, your people want and need to grow, to better themselves. Unleash your rainmakers by putting their talents to work in new ways. Your company, employees and customers will be much better for it. For example, a seemingly quiet, unassuming and very reliable person on your accounting team may be an excellent communicator who would love to assist marketing in responding to social media activity. An administrative assistant might be a natural at fielding sales inquiries and converting leads into customers. A hiring manager may possess innate process improvement skills that can make a huge difference in supply chain productivity and efficiency.

Here's an added benefit. If you practice succession planning (all companies should), tapping hidden

Why Wait for a Need to Arise? Get Prepared Now.

There are benefits to having a talent management system in place, a software solution that helps companies offer and manage professional development, recruit talent and track employee performance. One of the greatest benefits is having a method of interacting with employees at the right time – when you need to delegate tasks to the right people already on your payroll.

Fortunately, although it helps, software isn't needed to align employee interests with arising

...many organizations have up-and-comers hiding in their mailrooms, warehouses and other non-leadership areas. Michael Bloomberg used to be a parking lot attendant.

talents this way can prepare you and your employees for leadership roles you need to fill down the road. It's easier for them to hit the ground running if one foot is already in the door.

It's a fact that many organizations have up-and-comers hiding in their mailrooms, warehouses and other non-leadership areas. Michael Bloomberg used to be a parking lot attendant. Ellen DeGeneres shucked oysters. Barack Obama scooped ice cream. Pope Francis was a bar bouncer and Walmart's CEO worked at a distribution center.

You never know where exceptional talent is lurking in your organization until you ask. See them. Give them opportunities to grow.

needs. There are other ways to assess aspirations and have great people at the ready.

■ Seed the effort with motivational surveys, department meetings, workshops, one-on-one interviews, and communications through your intranet or other pipeline. Workshops are actually an excellent, proactive way to expose areas needing attention that management may not be aware of, and where ideas spawn volunteers to take on those tasks.

Ask employees what other areas of the company interest them. Some – possibly many – have never entertained such a thought, but now their interest is piqued. Give some suggestions by sharing areas that need support. Other employees may have burning desires that they would never voice unless you ask. Either way, get the conversation going! Start digging and learning about your people – your most valuable assets.

Ask why they believe they would be good at a certain function, what talents they possess and which skills they would like to develop. If your company supports on-the-job training, educational endeavors or sponsors certifications, ask employees which ways they would like to expand their knowledge.

You Will Do More Than Discover and Tap Hidden Talents

This effort helps you retain employees and build your bench. Stagnation is one of the main reasons people leave their companies, even more so than the size of their paychecks. Employees are looking for ways to expand their skill sets and experience. They want to become more valuable to their employers. They want greater personal and professional satisfaction.

When you let people become involved in other areas of the business, you both succeed. You grow together by fulfilling each other's needs. And better yet, you become known as an employer who cultivates people and builds careers. Top talent will flock to your doorstep.

And let's face it. Today's companies must find new ways to sustain and grow revenue. I can't think of a more lucrative plan than to identify and unleash the rainmakers who are right there under your nose, on your payroll and ready to help champion your needs and goals.



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