

EXECUTIVE EDGE

“A” Player Human Capital LeaderShift by
HUNT EXECUTIVE SEARCH

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For twenty-seven years, the Executive Edge has been a value added service to support our employers and candidates in their Personal & Professional Development.



Four Promises of Effective LeaderShift

By Joe Hunt

What makes a leader stand out as remarkably effective?

Everyone expects great things from leaders—probably more than is humanly possible. But leaders must deliver only four interdependent promises to drive business results. Failure to complete a single promise will likely lead to disappointing outcomes.

Consultants Robert J. Anderson and William A. Adams delineate these promises in *Mastering Leadership: An Integrated Framework for Breakthrough Performance and Extraordinary Business Results* (Wiley, 2015):

1. **Set the right direction** and create meaningful work.
2. **Engage all stakeholders** and hold them accountable for performance.
3. **Ensure that processes** and systems facilitate focus and execution.
4. **Lead effectively.** Maintain trust to achieve and sustain desired results.



Defining Effective LeaderShift

Some experts believe the most effective leaders bring about maximum financial results. Others would point to charismatic, larger-than-life CEOs who inspire followers with vision. Still others claim effective leaders have high levels of emotional intelligence, are skilled at making tough decisions, are relentlessly focused on execution, and excel at building trusting relationships.



Great Expectations

All of these leadership qualities matter a great deal. It is also difficult for leaders to perform effectively if they fail to manage perceptions and expectations. As Anderson and Adams explain:

"When we step into positions of leadership, we make a whole set of promises we may not know we are making. These promises are profound and come in the form of high, often unspoken, expectations. Understanding, managing and living up to these promises defines our leadership."

Followers have two types of expectations:

1. **Explicit:** Responsibilities to be fulfilled as part of the leadership role (fiscal responsibility, strategy and direction, accountability and execution).
2. **Implicit:** All of the unspoken expectations like competence, fair treatment, commitment, engagement, listening, inspiration, direction and meaning-making.

Implicit expectations can form a minefield, because they're based on assumptions, may be unrealistic, are often misunderstood, and vary greatly among stakeholders. We nevertheless judge leaders' effectiveness on both explicit and implicit expectations.

Smart leaders know they're always being judged. Success or failure depends on whether or not leaders clarify these role expectations and keep their promises. Hidden expectations will never be discovered unless a leader asks about them.

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Most of us assume we're on the same page as others, but every conversation offers an opportunity to elicit information about expectations. You accelerate your leadership effectiveness by asking about, learning and managing expectations.

Success vs. Effectiveness

Business success is not a measurement of leadership effectiveness. A business may take off, but leaders can still fall short unless they are skilled at influencing and inspiring people for the long term.

Leaders must master four key domains to be truly effective:

1. Strategy
2. Engagement
3. Execution
4. Leadership development



1. The First Promise: Set the Right Direction

The first leadership promise focuses on strategy, mission and values, and it's as much about profits as it is about people.

Stakeholders hold leaders to this vital promise because it establishes the “why” they're in business, as well as “what” the business will and won't do. This foundation sets direction and meaning, creating a culture in which people can thrive.

Direction and meaning set the stage for establishing a business identity and brand. Effective leaders can articulate their organizations' unique contributions to the world. They know their people want not only a paycheck, but alignment with company values. They want to contribute to a purpose beyond profits, so leaders must ensure these values are publicized and practiced throughout the business.

Leaders are most effective when they communicate a noble purpose to every employee. Otherwise, people struggle to define why their work matters.

2. The Second Promise: Engage All Stakeholders

Effective leaders foster a commitment to achieving results. They strive for engagement and assign accountability.

Unfortunately, clarity and commitment often end at the leadership-team level. In many instances, leaders know—but employees cannot explain—why their work makes a difference. Managers focus solely on accountability and performance, rather than engagement. Lacking are frequent references to organizational purpose and linking daily tasks to why individuals count.

Many executive and senior leadership teams underestimate the energy and commitment required to fully engage everyone. Leaders are most effective when they communicate and clarify a noble purpose. Successful efforts are rewarded with employees' energy and passion.

In fulfilling this second promise, leaders earn their staff's trust and commitment. They provide the why behind the what of work. Employees expect and want their leaders to draw out their potential, talent, strengths and energy. Leaders do this by creating a culture where people are allowed to grow, contribute, and be valued. They set challenging goals, provide resources, and address the reasons behind stated goals. When objectives are achieved, they provide recognition and rewards.

Engaging employees can pose challenges, but the next two promises depend on it. Each promise paves the way to the next and contributes to overall leadership effectiveness.

3. The Third Promise: Develop Processes and Facilitate Execution

Great leaders focus on key priorities. Yes, the bottom line looms large, but one achieves financial success only after keeping all four promises to stakeholders.

After setting the right direction and engaging stakeholders, a leader must then ensure that processes and systems facilitate focus and execution.

Leaders promise to deliver results in the marketplace by successfully executing on key initiatives. This enables stakeholder commitment. With commitment, you facilitate productivity through systems and processes that make execution successful.

Effective leaders channel action into results. They provide feedback on the work the organization is doing. Action links effort to results, letting everyone know when something works (or doesn't).

Processes and systems provide a clear path from task to long-term, meaningful results. This is the promise where the rubber meets the road.

According to Anderson and Adams, leaders often break this promise by:

1. Failing to provide the resources (time, people or money) necessary for execution.
2. Allowing the organization to be distracted by “silver bullets” or “bright shiny objects” (i.e., an attractive lower priority).
3. Having few or ineffective processes in place (i.e., everything is done for the first time, every time).
4. Being so process-bound that execution becomes secondary to the process itself.



Excessive focus on processes robs people of their energy and enthusiasm. In other cases, processes are in place, but are underused. Repeatedly breaking this leadership promise creates a cynical culture, frustration, and a “Why bother?” mentality.

4. The Fourth Promise: Lead Effectively

What, exactly, does “lead effectively” mean?

The first three promises are more tangible: the transactional competencies universally taught in business schools and leadership training courses.

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The fourth promise is another matter altogether: more difficult to undertake, yet capable of profoundly influencing all other competencies.

Effective leaders pursue personal and professional development opportunities to improve their competence, self-awareness and other-relatedness. They grow in ways that are transformative, not just transactional.

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We expect our leaders to be wise and evolve continually. In fact, we raise the bar every year. Without a commitment to enhancing personal and professional development, leaders can easily lose their competitive advantage. They fumble when trying to drive their people and companies to excellence.

When leaders balk at coaching, training and ongoing learning, they cannot meet the increasing demands of today's business environment, and they fail to deliver on the first three promises. In a word, they stagnate. Perhaps leadership coach Marshall Goldsmith puts it best: "What got you here won't get you there."



"Leadership development must proceed at a pace consistent with what it takes to stay effective and relevant in today's complex, rapidly changing business environment." ~ Anderson and Adams

The Executive Coaching Imperative

Growing a company requires leaders to commit to personal progress. Executive coaching has proved to be one of the most effective leadership-development tactics. A large body of evidence shows a positive return on investment. Even conservative measures estimate an average return of 5.7 times the cost of coaching.

A CEO's developmental stage significantly determines the success of large-scale corporate transformation programs. Leaders cannot sustain 21st-century effectiveness without continually upgrading their competencies, coping strategies, and capacity to influence others.

The Urgent Priority Leaders Don't Have Time For

Yet, few leaders regularly set priorities for professional growth. Even those engaged in executive-coaching relationships struggle to keep appointments to do the work. Like many of us, they're so mired in day-to-day challenges that they fail to think long term or take actions that may not have immediate payoffs.

If you're unable to work on identified gaps in self-awareness, core strength and coping skills, you're not just standing still; you're regressing.

Beware of Blind Spots

Every leader falters at some point: when under stress, with a fine-line ethical dilemma, or with a delicate choice between right and more right. You'll inevitably make a wrong decision. You probably won't see it coming until it's too late. When you realize what's happened, you'll know you're in a blind spot, and you'll recognize it because it's been with you a long time. If you recoil at the idea of coaching, training or other personal-growth tools, you're creating conditions for failure. You're breaking all four leadership promises that so many others expect you to keep.

Effective leaders know they cannot afford to stand still. The pace of business will eventually exceed their capacity to handle new challenges. In today's fast-paced, constantly changing, complex marketplace, no leader can expect that "what got me here will get me there."

What are you doing to keep the four promises to lead effectively?

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