



# Healthy Leaders

At sr4 Partners, we have worked with hundreds of leaders with a goal of building healthier organizations. Along that path, we have noticed that it's harder to achieve organizational health if specific leaders are not, themselves, operating in a healthy manner. And we've learned that there are certain recurring categories of ill-health in leaders. Among those categories are:

**Lack of Self-Awareness.** In which a leader leads from an unexamined base of their *preferences* – instead of a full arsenal of leadership skills from which to employ the right approach for each situation. It's *This is how I like to do it...* rather than *This is the approach that these circumstances call for.* Or, they're blinded by the way they move through the world, not accounting for the reality that others may move differently – and there is no right way or wrong way.

**Ineffective Communication.** In which a leader says what they think needs to be *said* – when they should be saying what needs to be *heard*. They broadcast too much *what you need to do and not enough why this is important to all of us and how you can get it done with available time and resources.* Or maybe they don't communicate at all.

**Infrequent Feedback.** In which they see things they like or don't like, but don't say anything about it. Or they wait too long to tell someone how they're doing in their role or in particular situations. Or they save everything up for one big year-end blow-out discussion – instead of offering it in real time, in the moment, while it's fresh, when something could be done about it.

**Conflicting Priorities.** In which it's like the old saying, *you can have it on-time, under-budget, with top quality – pick two.* As a leader you want it all, but if pursuing one priority hinders the pursuit of another one, the organization is confused until the leader points the way forward.

**Poor Delegation.** In which, for example, a technically adept leader keeps solving problems with their technical expertise instead of working through other people. That may result in an excellent solution to that particular issue – but to the detriment of the leadership function, the developmental growth of the organization, and the morale of everyone who thought it was their job to solve the problem.

To address these behaviors, we can conduct Leadership 360s, provide

coaching for individual leaders, provide training to develop skills and knowledge, and provide a unique intervention that we call *New Leader Clarity*.

Our name for this focus area is *Healthy Leaders*. Our intention is to partner with an organization's leaders to help them hone their strengths, mitigate their weaknesses, develop needed skills, and process the challenges they face.

On a recent New Leader Clarity project we received a letter from the individual with whom we worked. The letter included this statement: "The Stanford Business School has this tagline that goes, '*Change Lives. Change organizations. Change the world.*' The impact you've had on me in our short time together has been pretty momentous and I know that our organization is stronger from your influence across our leadership team."

## In Practice

Over the course of our careers, we've spent a lot of time working on the inside of sales organizations, and we've become familiar with how the career pathing typically works: You're a great salesperson, made goal three years in a row – so they make you a district sales manager. Now, instead of making sales calls, you're holding weekly one-on-one meetings with the 10 sales people who report to you. You're spending two days a week doing ride-alongs with people who are doing what you used to do, but all of them doing it worse than you ever did it. And on Fridays you're at a desk doing expense reporting, routing, and monthly activity reports. Then, if you excel at that, they make you a regional sales director, where you're a leader of leaders. Now there are 100 salespeople who report through 10 district managers, up to you. And you have the home office breathing down your neck. If you master all that, maybe they put you in charge of sales training. From there, you're looking at Vice President-Sales. Somewhere along that path, about six weeks into a new role, you might hit a rough patch, where every skill and every ability that's ever worked for you before is not helpful to you now. If you're lucky, there's someone a level or two above you who says, "*Hang on, we're going to send someone...*" That someone is...US! We're going to do *New Leader Clarity* with you.

It's a one-day session. We ask you five questions, starting with *Why does your role exist?* and ending with *What's the most important thing for this role to be doing, right now?* followed by *How will YOU behave, right now, in this role, doing that most important thing?*

Let's say you're a new vice president of marketing. We sit down with you and work our way through the five questions. Then we come back to you with a plan for the next 18 months. The plan is built on three pillars that have emerged as most relevant to your circumstances. The first two pillars are *Team Health* and *Team Performance*. The third pillar, surprisingly, is *Personal Health*, given that you have divulged to us a health issue that will become evident to the organization during this 18-month planning period, but of which the organization is not yet aware. You will then share your plan with your boss, who will provide

feedback, and then the plan will be revised.

## Something You Can Do, Now

At your next leadership meeting, ask everyone to come prepared to tell a story about a time when they were performing as close as they could get, even for a moment or two, to what they considered a great leader to be. As each person tells their story, everyone else should be listening with a pen and a pad of Post-It notes. They're listening in a very particular way: with an ear for what was present either in the organization or in the personal situation that enabled the speaker to feel they were being the very best leader they could be in that moment. And they're writing those things down on the Post-It notes. The notes might read: "Top management support"..."Clear expectations ..."Executing a plan." Or, "Supportive spouse"..."Strong network"..."Mentoring others."

After all the stories have been told, collect the Post-It notes and group them into categories. Use those categories to start a conversation for how to turn your organization into an environment in which create *Healthy Leaders* are self-generating.

## Something We Can Do, Together

Maybe you have a new leader in a key position who could benefit from a *New Leader Clarity*. Maybe you would feel like a healthier leader yourself if you had a coach to call for any leadership issue that comes up. Maybe the best way your leaders to live into their roles and continuously improve is for them to have a coach. Maybe you could see the value in Self-Awareness training (or *Effective Communication, Frequent Feedback, Priority Conflict, Delegation* training) for all leaders in your organization. Maybe you have an annual leadership conference that would be more "actionable" if it had breakout sessions structured around our *Healthy Leaders* focus area. Maybe you'd just like to know someone who's always thinking about what *Healthy Leaders* look like and what kinds of organizations tend to produce them. There are so many ways we can tailor our lifelong learning to your needs of the present moment.

Our focus on *Healthy Leaders* exists within and is nurtured by the sr4 context of *The Healthy Organization*, which also includes *Cohesive Teams, Thriving Cultures, and Inclusive Change*. These are the building blocks that have emerged, for us, from our belief that most people truly want to do great work, but *things* get in the way. Many of those "things" are accepted as *just the way organizations are* – *which we have come to see as just the way organizations might tend to be, but not irrevocably so!*

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