

WHITE PAPER

The New High-Performance Leader

by Howard M. Guttman



The New High-Performance Leader

AT A GLANCE

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This White Paper is based on articles by Howard M. Guttman that originally appeared in *Leadership Excellence* magazine. It is part of a continuing series from Guttman Development Strategies, Inc. dealing with high-performance management. Other White Papers in the series include: "Alignment for Top Performance: What It Is and How to Achieve It," "World-Class Coaching: What Does It Really Take?," and "Building Horizontal Organizations."

*by Paul Sturman
President, Johnson &
Johnson Consumer
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The publication of Howard Guttman's White Paper, "The New High-Performance Leader," comes at a time when I've been doing a great deal of thinking about the issue of leadership. Following the merger of Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson, I recently moved from my position as senior vice president of marketing, Pfizer Consumer Healthcare to become president of J&J Consumer Healthcare.

As the leader of this newly merged division, I've been grappling with a number of challenges, but none more important than the question: How do I take two unique cultures and mold them into one power-on, high-performance team? Guttman Development Strategies' focus on leaders as master relationship builders reaffirms my own decision to start at the ground zero of organizational life—not with structure, systems, and processes, but with individuals and teams—taking care to build solid relationships with my new colleagues. As this White Paper argues, I am convinced that being "player centered" cuts to the heart of leadership and points to the pathway for changing organizational culture and behavior.

Effective leadership goes well beyond attention to product innovation, business development, brand management, or bottom-line performance. It also includes connecting with your people, one-on-one. Talk to them: not just about the business, but about personal values, life and career aspirations, worries and concerns about the future. Engage them, encourage them, and trust that they want to do the best job. That's how I have begun to build a new high-performance senior team at J&J and how I expect the members of my management team to begin developing relationships within and across their functions.

One caveat: relationship building is not just an exercise in human relations management. It requires a lot more than "soft" skills and being a "people person." It is a highly disciplined process: one rooted in strategic and operational alignment of teams at every level, peer-to-peer and peer-to-leader accountability, and agreed-upon rules for interpersonal behavior. After reading this White Paper, you should have a good idea of what this process entails and how different it is from those typical off-site bonding experiences

For example, when I took over the U.S. marketing group at Pfizer, there was confusion about who was accountable for which decisions. I began by aligning my team in the area of roles and responsibilities. We created a matrix: on one axis we listed all the types of decisions

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to be made: those relating to promotional events, advertising campaigns, regulatory approval of copy, new product releases, and so on. On the other axis we listed the various levels of management. For each type of decision, we talked about how each level would be involved: as a consultant, an information source, the ultimate decision maker, etc. At the end of the long, tough session, there was no longer any doubt about who was responsible for what.

In the end, our conversations about decision making were more important than the matrix itself. They allowed people to express concerns, ask questions, and break down the “stories” that team members had been holding on to about how decisions had been made in the past and how they might or should be made in the future. The lesson I learned: keep people talking and riveted on taking their performance to new levels. Provide an open, nonjudgmental environment in which people can feel comfortable voicing their opinions without fear of reprisal. Keep off-limits subjects to a minimum; if there are any, make sure everyone knows what they are and why. Encourage honest feedback—especially when it’s about you.

If your people aren’t willing to walk through glass for you and the business values you represent, chances are you are not an effective leader. Read “The New High-Performance Leader” carefully. Then move quickly to put into practice the ideas it espouses. It’s a sure-fire way to become a high-performance leader in a high-performance organization.

I. The Dimensions of High-Performance Leadership

“If a lieutenant in Iraq isn’t prepared to ride the Humvee down the road, he can’t expect his troops to do it.”

—*Chuck Nesbit,
executive vice president
and COO, Chico’s FAS, Inc.*



I. The Dimensions of High-Performance Leadership

When you clear the leadership field of all the rubble, there is one quality that distinguishes high-performance leaders from the pack: They are adept relationship builders. This ability goes well beyond the notion that every great leader is a born “people person,” with natural “interpersonal skills.” Great leaders of great organizations work hard to build solid, no-nonsense, performance-based relationships with those around them. They cast aside the old employer-employee hierarchy and replace it with a new leader-player model that emphasizes shared decision making and accountability in a horizontal organization. And they do so by first putting tough questions to themselves and their senior management teams:

- What’s the business strategy, and how committed are we to achieving it?
- What key operational goals flow from the strategy, and how do we make sure these goals drive day-to-day decision making?
- Are we clear on roles and accountabilities?
- What ground rules will we play by as a team?
- Will our business relationships be built on honesty and transparency?

In the process of raising these questions and in the give-and-take search for answers with colleagues, effective leaders establish a solid business case for the senior-management team’s existence, along with a set of behaviors that move it to excel. What emerges is a fully aligned and engaged team of players who think and act like a mini board of directors.¹ *When effective leaders turn around and look at their senior management team, they see a group of equally effective leaders.*

Examine a few high-performing organizations, and you’ll discover a consistent pattern. You’ll encounter leaders who realize that they cannot exist apart from great teams. They lay the groundwork by building a rigorously performance-oriented senior management team. This then becomes the energizing principal for transforming teams everywhere in the organization. Before long, a great organization emerges with great teams led by great leaders at every level.

Listen to Rob Gordon, CEO of Dairy Farmers of Australia, talk about the horizontal organization he helped to bring about: It’s “an organization in which everyone operates according to a clearly defined set of decision-making protocols, where people understand what they are accountable for and then own the results. . . . It means giving employees the opportunity and skills to decide who needs to be involved in solving problems and making decisions, dividing responsibilities, then stepping aside to allow people to implement.”

¹ For an in-depth discussion of alignment, see “Alignment for Top Performance: What It Is and How to Achieve It,” a White Paper written by Howard M. Guttman.

The Leader as Architect

The leader as visionary—it has become a standard-issue cliché of management literature. The problem is that great visionaries often don't lead their teams down from the mountaintop. Given the demands placed on today's organizations, visions need to be operationalized, which is a unique strength of high-performance leaders. They have an architect's flair: able to see the whole game—the blueprint, not just the vision—for creating a high-performance, horizontal organization. And they know how to inspire in others the desire to make that blueprint a reality.

At Dairy Farmers of Australia, for example, within the fast-moving consumer goods sector consumers were becoming more and more sophisticated, with ever-increasing demands. The sector was also witnessing dairy production declining, international “farm gate” milk prices skyrocketing to historic highs, and record global fuel costs. CEO Rob Gordon knew that business as usual was no longer possible. His “blueprint,” as the words we quoted indicate, was to create a high-performing organization. Gordon and other high-performance “architects” whom we know commit to building an organization in which every team and every player is aligned: From top to bottom, everyone shares and operates from a common framework that flows from the “alignment” questions we raised at the beginning of this paper.

From Blueprint to Building

Like any great architect, the high-performance leader knows that he or she cannot go it alone. The first task is to build a top-management team that is committed to the new blueprint. The high-performance leadership model is radically different from the old leader-follower paradigm. Key to its power and success is the leader's ability to surround himself or herself with players at every level who are fully accountable for their own business results, who hold peers accountable for achieving results, and who step up to hold their leaders accountable for results within their area of the business.

High-performance leader-architects surround themselves with people who can bring their blueprint to life. They don't put the hammer to the wood, but they need people who can. They remain riveted on answering such questions as: Who are the players? What competencies must we develop or acquire to create a high-performance organization? What role do I play in bringing this about?

High-performance leaders are superb talent managers; they ensure that everyone in the organization not only wants to but can contribute. This entails equipping everyone with a special portfolio of skills that includes conflict resolution, active listening, influencing others, giving and receiving feedback, and decision making.

No amount of training will stick, however, if leaders don't walk the talk. As Chuck Nesbit, executive vice president and COO of Chico's FAS, put it, "If a lieutenant in Iraq isn't prepared to ride the Humvee down the road, he can't expect his troops to do it." A leader who brooks no disagreement can hardly expect others to encourage open dialogue.

Letting Go: The First Step

Leaders get paid to produce results through others. This makes leadership a profoundly social act and raises the question: What should a leader's relationship be to his or her players? The leader as an omniscient decision maker may have worked well at one time, but for a variety of reasons, including the tendency to create player dependency, the Solomon approach to leadership is no longer viable.

In addition, most of the decision-making action in today's organizations occurs in teams. Recognizing this, effective leaders at every level, from the executive suite to the plant floor, work with their respective teams to develop a broad range of decision-making options. For example: How will important decisions be made: unilaterally, collaboratively, or by consensus? Who will be consulted for information? For opinions? Who will make the final decision? Who will execute it? And, perhaps most importantly, when will the leader "let go" and pass decision-making responsibility to team members?

This new leader-player paradigm requires a major change in mindsets—beginning with that of the leader. Part of the challenge involves the leader's ability to put aside ego and not merely *encourage* others to make decisions and produce results but actually *hold them accountable* for doing so. As Craig Williams, director of HR, Johnson & Johnson Vision Care, sees it, today's leaders must move beyond being Mr. Problem Solver and Ms. Decision Maker to become questioners, coaches, and enablers. Says Williams, "We must transition to leaders who enable others to produce results, who provide the resources and skills for decision making, and who foster a culture of accountability."

In the good ol' days, the leader could succeed by wielding a big stick. Today, leaders better show up with a broom. As Linda Scard-Buitenhek, vice president, cleansing platform, skin care, Johnson & Johnson Consumer Products Company, observes, leaders have an obligation "to sweep the path in front of teams, making sure they have the necessary resources, especially when things change."

"Letting go" does not mean that leaders play a passive or sideline role. Just as an architect remains the vital link for project success, today's high-performance leaders are at the core of their organization's success, as they strive to reframe hierarchical structures to become horizontal enterprises,

rethink their own role, redefine what it means for others to be players and contributors, and remain committed to building shareholder and stakeholder value.

The High-Performance Leader as Mentor

When Chico's executive team decided to move the organization to a higher level of performance, they used a two-pronged approach. They implemented a process for developing a new strategic plan and, at the same time, they began to build high-performance teams, beginning with an "alignment" of the top team. The next tier of vice presidents and directors liked what they saw and decided that they too wanted to step up to greater decision-making authority and accountability for business results.

Now, says Chuck Nesbit, a couple of years later, the VPs and directors are running the day-to-day business. The senior team has been freed up to concentrate on "where the ship is going, not how it's getting there." As a result, Nesbit says he now views himself as a mentor and teacher more than as a director of people. "I serve as a sounding board. I give perspective. I ask questions. I provide people with the resources they need and allow them to be in situations where they can succeed. I also give them the latitude to make mistakes and learn from them—even if it means stopping myself from intervening while they do it."

Today, leadership by cruise control is not an option. It used to be that organizations enjoyed periods of homeostasis, hit a speed bump, then went through another period of homeostasis before the next round of change. Now, there are only speed bumps. In a world in which pressure never ends, leaders must keep everyone focused and performance ratcheted up.

High-performance leaders behave in such a way that they engender in those around them a sense of confidence that by working together the organization will win. Who better to do this than a leader able to energize and tap everyone's potential?

The new high-performance leader is very much in command without commanding. His is not a leaderless team, but a team of leaders. As Craig Williams points out, "When you walk into a room and watch a team in action for about 30 minutes, without knowing any of the members or their titles, and at the end of that time you can't identify the 'leader'—that team has a great leader."

II. Player-Centered Leadership: The New Imperative

“I try to be on the alert for ways to maximize my effectiveness with each person I work with, based on the situation at hand.”

— *Lew Frankfort,
chairman and CEO,
Coach, Inc.*



II. Player-Centered Leadership: The New Imperative

Lew Frankfort, CEO and chairman of Coach, Inc., knows that there is no single, “right” way to lead, as he explains:

I try to be on the alert for ways to maximize my effectiveness with each person I work with, based on the situation at hand. My style with each of my teams varies based on the situation and my relationship with my people. In some cases I feel very comfortable saying, “I’m telling you to do this” At other times, I decide to hang back, maybe to participate, but to let others take the lead. For instance, if a person is really expert in his or her field, I don’t need to do much more than provide an understanding of goals and some oversight. . . . I also coach in many ways: by modeling behavior; by consistently using rigor and logic to make decisions; by setting realistic, firm expectations; and by providing critical feedback—both constructive criticism when a person is underperforming and appreciation when they have been successful.

Astute leaders like Frankfort have a laser-like ability to focus on the capabilities of their team. They know how to vary their decision-making behavior depending on the skill level of each team member. They may **prescribe/direct**, telling players the what, where, when, and how of an issue. Or they may **coach/instruct**, de-emphasizing the “how” in favor of the “why.” They may choose to **collaborate/partner** with their team. Or they may choose to **inspire/empower**, allowing team members to “run with the ball.”

Here is a brief description of each of the four leadership behaviors:

Prescribing/Directing

Prescribing/Directing has a long pedigree. In the old, vertical organization, orders came down from on high and were expected to be carried out without question. In today’s horizontal, matrix organizations, where managers often need to get results from those over whom they have no direct authority, the ability to influence—to persuade others to change their point of view and behavior so they are aligned with yours—has become a critical skill.

Sometimes it is obvious from the questions the person asks that additional direction is required before a task can be carried out or a decision made. In other cases, the leader may have to test the person’s capabilities with questions such as:

- What experience have you had working with _____?
- When you had a project similar to _____, what were the first steps you took to get it rolling? How would you begin to get this project going?
- When you put together task forces in the past, how did you decide who should be on the team? Who would you want on the team for this project?

The responses to these and other capability-testing questions tell the leader a great deal about the individual's ability to work independently and about the degree of direction that will be needed.

Coaching/Instructing

Even in cases where players possess the ability and willingness to step up to increased responsibility, leaders must proceed cautiously. Before leaders can legitimately hold people accountable for solving problems, making decisions, and managing conflict, they must ratchet up the level of competency. By coaching players through tough issues, leaders help them develop the skills they will need to operate effectively on their own.

One key to effective coaching/instructing is to refuse to be drawn into the "content trap." Once a leader becomes entangled in the details of an issue, it's often hard to resist the temptation to start giving advice and offering solutions, which completely defeats the purpose of coaching. Here, there is an obvious parallel with the old saying, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." Give a player a solution and you enable that person to resolve a specific issue; teach a player how to arrive at solutions and you enable that person to resolve future issues.

Collaborating/Partnering

Many players are anxious about "trying their wings," even after considerable coaching. An astute leader recognizes this and shifts his or her behavior accordingly. Agreeing to collaborate with the player or players in the resolution of the issue is often a good compromise. But, before the leader commits to this arrangement, it is important to make clear the reasons he or she is going to be involved.

We recommend that the leader ask the following clarifying questions:

- Why do you believe that it's necessary for me to collaborate in the resolution of this issue?
- What is the value you see yourself bringing to the resolution of this issue?
- What value do you see me bringing?
- What do you need/want from me in order to make this collaboration work?
- What can I expect from you?
- Who will have the final say?

While collaborating in a problem-solving or decision-making session, the leader can take the opportunity to do some additional coaching, increasing the skills and confidence level of those involved.

Inspiring/Empowering

Inspiring/Empowering implies the highest level of trust. When a leader empowers others, he or she hands over the reins, in one area at least, to one or more members of the team. They are on their own, fully accountable—and, hopefully, fully equipped—to take action.

Once again, it is the responsibility of the leader to make sure that those who will be held accountable for results are set up for success and not failure. Before empowering others, the leader needs to ask:

- Do they have all the information, or access to the information sources, that they will need to resolve this issue?
- Do they have the resources, such as headcount, budget, space, with which to carry out their assignment?
- Do they have all the tools they will need, including hardware, software, and printed materials?
- Have they forged, or have I forged for them, relationships with colleagues whose help they may need during the project?

Empowering is, of course, the most efficient leadership behavior. In the case of the leader of the top team, empowering frees him or her from many of the day-to-day, operational concerns that divert attention from strategic issues. Empowerment at every level of management saves time by eliminating the need to go back to the leader for approval. It short-circuits conflict by removing the leader, and his or her preconceived notions, from the loop. It keeps accountability for decision making closest to the action. And, most importantly, it increases an organization's bench strength. It creates a new generation of leaders who will be able to take over, without trepidation, when their turn comes.

Homing in on the Leadership Needs of Your Players

Leaders must adjust their behaviors to the needs of their team members, or players. Diagnosing those needs—and determining which leadership behavior to adopt—entail analyzing two factors:

ENGAGEMENT: An individual's commitment to being a team player; his or her willingness to take ownership of and be held accountable for the team's success; his or her intention to embrace the eight attributes of high-performance teams.

SKILLS: The knowledge and skills an individual brings to a goal or task; education, experience, and/or ability; the individual's appropriate utilization of his or her technical/leadership, interpersonal, and strategic skills in the context of meeting performance targets.

² For a list of the eight attributes of a high-performance team, see page 9 of "Alignment for Top Performance: What It Is and How to Achieve It," a White Paper written by Howard M. Guttman.

Depending on the degree to which they are engaged and skilled, players will fall into one of four major categories.

- Low level of engagement and/or skill set
- Moderately low level of engagement and/or skill set
- Moderately high level of engagement and/or skill set
- High level of engagement and skill set

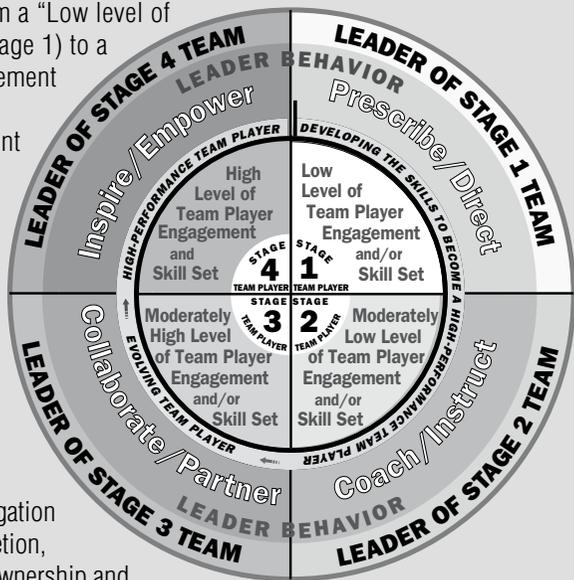
Each of these categories requires a different kind of leadership. The following inset, “Adjusting Leader Behavior to Player Needs,” offers leaders some guidelines for adjusting their behavior accordingly.

Adjusting Leader Behavior to Player Needs

As a team player progresses from a “Low level of engagement and/or skill set” (Stage 1) to a “Moderately high level of engagement and/or skill set” (Stage 3), the leader needs to reduce the amount of direction and increase the amount of support.

When a team player reaches a “High level of engagement and skill set” (Stage 4), the leader decreases the amount of both directive and supportive behavior.

The result: The leader of a Stage 4 team player allows increased delegation and empowerment for task completion, which promotes higher levels of ownership and accountability. This behavior is seen as an indication of trust and increased levels of confidence and commitment.



Player Engagement and Skill Stages	Recommended Leader Behavior
Stage 1 - Low level of engagement and/or skill set	→ Stage 1 - Prescribe/Direct
Stage 2 - Moderately low level of engagement and/or skill set	→ Stage 2 - Coach/Instruct
Stage 3 - Moderately high level of engagement and/or skill set	→ Stage 3 - Collaborate/Partner
Stage 4 - High level of engagement and skill set	→ Stage 4 - Inspire/Empower

The Challenge of Changing Your Leadership Behavior

Leaders often find it difficult to adjust their behavior to every contingency and every player. Like anyone else, most leaders have a preferred way of behaving that has worked for them in the past, and that behavior is typically supported by a set of rationalizations or “going-in stories.” It’s a lot easier to lead by the behavior that is “you” than to match your behavior to the learning curve of each of your direct reports.

Take the leader who prefers to delegate. His or her going-in story may be that, “Someone at this level should know how to do this on her own.” But that “someone” may have just been promoted and, therefore, lack the experience base to go it alone. After all, people get promoted on the basis of the last thing they did well, which doesn’t guarantee immediate success at the next level. The leader who doesn’t enjoy coaching or participating is more likely to be hiding behind the “they should know how to do this” story to avoid having to adopt an unfamiliar behavior mode.

The leader who has a problem adjusting his or her behavior needs to ask, “What going-in story am I holding on to that’s keeping me from making this change?” and “Why?” Self-examination may be enough to break through the barrier; if not, personal coaching may be called for.

One vice president we worked with realized that he tended to be very directive and had trouble “connecting,” but when he got candid feedback from the members of his team, he was surprised to learn that they judged him to be far more aggressive than he believed he was. As a result, they were uncomfortable expressing their viewpoints or making decisions on their own. He received similar feedback from his boss, which spurred him to seek coaching.

During his first session with the coach, the VP explained that, as a leader, he was unsure of how his team was progressing and where he needed to take it next. His statement prompted the coach to comment, “Now I know why you are so intimidating.” “What are you talking about? I haven’t said anything to you,” countered the VP. “That’s exactly the point,” replied the coach. “You keep your cards so close to the chest, so covered up, that I have no idea what you’re thinking and what’s going on with you. I can see why people who work for you would feel the same sense of not knowing what’s going on with you. I can see why they’re intimidated.”

The vice president bristled at the exchange. But a day later he contacted the coach to thank him for his insight. The coach, of course, had simply been “mirroring” his client’s behavior, which caused the VP to see the light. As he said about his coach, “He exposed me and initially I didn’t like it, but I needed to hear it.” Once the VP had seen himself as others saw him, he could begin making changes. As he projected a more open, receptive image, the people on his team became more comfortable offering opinions and taking on decision-making responsibility.

Another executive worked hard to tone down her image as a super-efficient, no-nonsense manager who had little time to involve others in decision making. Her efforts to solicit others' opinions, truly listen to them, and engage in a dialogue rather than a monologue changed the tenor of the workplace considerably. As she puts it, "Very little changed, except me, but things are entirely different as a result."

In many ways, changing one's leadership behavior goes against nature—or at least nurture. But, given the dynamics of the modern organization, a leader cannot afford to remain stuck in old patterns, no matter how comfortable or useful they have been in the past.

Leaders must adapt to the new imperative. They must serve as role models for thoughtful decision making, allow players to try their decision-making wings, reward successful decisions, and reinforce learning from not-so-good ones. Then they must let go.

III. Conflict Management: Core Leadership Capability

“The leader is responsible for the company’s tone and the environment in which people work.”

— *Lee Chaden,*
executive vice president,
Sara Lee Corporation;
CEO, Sara Lee Branded
Apparel



III. Conflict Management: Core Leadership Capability

Beneath a good deal of organizational life is the undertow of dysfunctional conflict, and no matter how much of “the right stuff” a leader possesses, it can drag down the entire operation. Neglecting this aspect of leadership is more dangerous than ever before, given today’s global, wired-for-speed business organization, where unresolved conflict has the potential to escalate and permeate the business “at the speed of thought.”

Conflict is a multifaceted phenomenon. It can be manifest or latent, overt or hidden. Overt conflict is in-your-face disagreement. It occurs when executives square off at a committee meeting or when someone comes into your office complaining loudly about next year’s budget. Hidden conflict is submerged disagreement. It occurs when people sit quietly though meetings plotting ways to sabotage their teammates when they walk out of the room. It shows itself indirectly, through lack of cooperation between departments or procrastination on project deadlines.

A company that does not manage internal conflict will not succeed, regardless of its effort to reengineer structures and processes, rev up sales and marketing efforts, develop and acquire new products, and dot-com the business. When conflict is ignored—especially at the top—the result will be an enterprise that competes more passionately with itself than with its competitors.

Unresolved conflict, especially at the highest level of an organization, can result in unfortunate, and potentially deadly, consequences, such as:

- Unproductive activity
- Anger and hostility
- Increased costs and waste
- Poor quality
- Reduced productivity
- Increased absenteeism and turnover

In spite of these ills, putting an end to conflict is the last thing leaders should hope to achieve. Conflict should be managed, not eliminated. Leaders must be at the forefront of conflict, managing it—and serving as role models—everywhere in the organization.

Lee Chaden, executive vice president, Sara Lee Corporation, and CEO, Sara Lee Branded Apparel, sums up the power of the leader to set the tone for the entire organization, especially as it relates to conflict management:

The leader is responsible for the company’s tone and the environment in which people work. If the leader is confrontational, divisive, and plays individuals against one another out of the belief that internal competitiveness is a good thing, that modus operandi is going to permeate the organization. There is going to be a lot

of unconstructive conflict. If, on the other hand, the leader sets a tone of collaboration and teamwork and makes it clear that that's his value system, it will become the value system of the whole organization.

Prior to becoming CEO of Kinetic Concepts, Inc., Catherine Burzik spent two years as president of Applied Biosystems (AB). She began setting just such a tone as soon as she joined AB. One of the toughest challenges she faced stemmed from a lack of strategic alignment among her direct reports. She discovered that several members of her new team would appear to agree to decisions in team meetings but then go back to their organizations to drive different, nonaligned agendas. Often this misalignment was apparent to subsets of the team, but not to the entire team—and the subsets failed to bring the issues to everyone's attention. This conflict would eventually become obvious to the entire team during a number of strategic business reviews, such as the annual operating plan and annual R&D prioritization reviews. The situation eventually crescendoed, leading Burzik to take action on several team members.

The experience proved to be a major moment of truth in the evolution of the team. As Burzik explained, “When you have an issue like this, it has to be put before members of the entire team. They were often hoping that I would see and handle it, so they waited and didn't take action. They realized that it wasn't just my business to run; it was theirs as well. As a result, we began discussing sensitive issues at every meeting, and I was not the one that usually put the issues on the table.”

Burzik also took seriously adherence to the conflict management protocols that the team had agreed on. She would not permit—or engage in—triangulation or attempting to recruit supporters, accusing in absentia, or raising “hands from the grave” to second-guess the team's decisions.

Leaders as Conflict Managers: The Range of Options

There is a continuum along which people's behavior ranges: from nonassertive to assertive to aggressive. When a leader's—or for that matter any team member's—behavior falls into one of the two extremes on the continuum, there is sure to be fallout.

Consider the CEO of one \$10 billion financial services firm, a nonassertive type who had come up through the ranks and wanted to be one of the group. When an issue surfaced between two executives on his team, he tried to resolve it “through the back door” by meeting separately with each combatant, rather than encouraging the two to resolve their own conflict. His involvement ensured short-term domestic tranquility, but it also guaranteed that all of the team's problems would linger behind

the scenes. Triangulation—taking an issue to a third-party rescuer for resolution—was inevitable and, not surprisingly, those problems grew to epic proportions. Before long, the CEO had a mess on his hands.

The nice-guy model of leadership just doesn't work when managing conflict. Neither does the aggressive approach. The tough-guy leader typically carries baggage that is unsuited for building a high-performance management team, such as being controlling, unreceptive to feedback, and intimidating. Team members are afraid to confront issues or individuals. Or they go on the defensive, personalizing issues, pointing fingers, and feeling attacked. In this case, either bombs go bursting in air, and there is overt conflict as members model the leader's behavior, or conflict goes underground as all the intrigue of triangulation sets in as people attempt to win the leader's favor.

The ideal leader is neither nonassertive nor aggressive, but assertive: sensitive to others' needs, yet able to get his or her own needs met without deferring to others or walking over them. Moving to this interpersonal style should be the goal of every individual in the high-performance organization, beginning with its leaders.

Unfortunately, interpersonal style doesn't change overnight or permanently: We are bound to backslide now and then, and it helps to have a plan in place to deal with those moments of regression. Feedback is one of the best correctives. For many leaders, asking for—and accepting—honest feedback is alien and uncomfortable. After all, it's always easier to dish it out than to receive it. But for those leaders who have made the commitment to change, the payback is substantial.

Leaders must also remain vigilant, on their own account, if they want to avoid backsliding into an ineffective conflict management style. One vice president recalls a conversation she had with her coach, in which she revealed that after returning from an extended vacation she was having trouble executing the new behaviors she had been learning to internalize before she went away. The coach responded that, "You need to think about these behaviors as though they were a blouse that you put on every morning. They need to become part of your daily routine, something that you don't think about at all, that is completely intuitive." The image of waking up in the morning and slipping on these new behaviors has stuck in the mind of the VP, and she conjures it up at the beginning of each day. It helps, she says, "because I am trying to teach an old dog new tricks, and it's very easy for old dogs to return to their old tricks."

IV. Follow a Leader: A Case Study

“It’s not enough for a leader to say, ‘We’re all in this together.’ You have to show, by your actions, that you are part of the team—not above it.”

— *Grant Reid,*
executive vice president
of sales and customer care,
Mars Incorporated, Snack



IV. Follow a Leader: A Case Study

Leadership is well-trodden terrain, with Blanchard and Hershey's Situational Leadership, Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid, Vroom and Yetton's Normative and Contingency Models, Covey's "7 Habits," and a host of other concepts and methodologies dominating the landscape. Perhaps the best way to gain fresh insight into the subject is to follow a leader in action.

When Grant Reid, executive vice president of sales and customer care for Mars Incorporated, Snack, assumed full responsibility for Snack sales, he faced a significant leadership challenge. Sales had not met expectations in this key strategic unit, and a quick turnaround was needed. It was akin to "changing the wings on the airplane while it was flying." Here are six principles that guided him during this flight.

1. Don't Bury the Past; Build on It

Reid knew that organization structure had been a big factor in not meeting objectives. Under the old structure, he had shared responsibility with the unit VP of sales. This had led to the usual issues related to strategy, priorities, and accountability.

One way to lead is to blame others. This wasn't the way Reid wanted to lead. "If the decision [to remove the unit VP of sales] had been based purely on results, we would both be gone," Reid told the unit sales group in his first meeting with them. It was an honest and forthright statement, which won Reid immediate respect from his new team. He praised his former colleague for the way he had handled himself: encouraging his department to work with Reid to make the integrated sales group a success.

Reid stressed that, going forward, sales had to have one strategy and one set of goals and priorities that guided everyone. They were going to put the past behind them, but not before they had learned all they could from it.

2. It's All about Relationships

Reid realized that his new troops wouldn't transfer their allegiance overnight; he was going to have to work hard to win them over.

He set up individual meetings with each of the unit's vice presidents and his or her direct reports. "The first cut was not about competency, but about commitment," said Reid. "Did they believe what I was telling them? Were they comfortable with me? Would they buy into my vision?"

He encouraged them to speak openly and honestly, asking each, "How are you feeling? What are you thinking about your future here? What are your major concerns? How can I help?"

As they responded, he used active listening skills to identify the underlying messages. He was particularly attuned to body language. "If someone tells you they're really committed while they're looking at their

shoes, be concerned,” he advises.

Reid learned that people wanted reassurance that their future was secure. He explained to people what their role would be, what they should focus on, and what was going to change. He also promised that he wasn't going to play favorites.

3. Don't Just Lead Your Team—Be a Part of It

Throughout his career, Grant Reid has gone beyond “management by walking around” to “management by working around.” Early in his career, as plant manager at an M&Ms plant, Reid made a point of actually doing every job in the plant. He connected hoses, put sugar into the storage hoppers, melted cocoa butter, ran the packaging equipment—even swept the floor. All because he believes deeply that a leader must understand the business and the people that make it run. “After that, when we had a meeting and people talked about a problem with a particular piece of obscure equipment, I knew exactly what they were talking about. I had helped to run that machine.”

Reid also believes that leaders shouldn't ask others to do things they wouldn't do themselves. “Once, when we had a major storm, we didn't close the plant for the night shift. I made sure that I was there with my associates.” It bought Reid a lot of equity, but that's not why he did it. “It's not enough for a leader to say, ‘We're all in this together.’ You have to show, by your actions, that you are part of the team—not above it.”

4. Help Everyone Become a High Performer

Grant Reid made good on his promise to forge a new, unified sales team where everyone's contribution would be equally valued. Since January, over 600 people from the central sales organization have been integrated into Snack's sales group, and the process has gone smoothly because Reid and his team have seen to it that they have received the skills they need to work together as a seamless, high-performing team.

He began by getting agreement from his vice presidents on Snack's future strategy. The newly integrated team revisited the strategy that was already in place and reconfirmed that it was the right one and that the five key strategic initiatives that stemmed from it were still the team's highest priorities.

After ensuring that his VPs were aligned around strategy and goals, Reid quickly moved to align them around the other elements that make for a high-performing team: roles and responsibilities; protocols, or rules of engagement for making decisions and dealing with conflict; and business relationships, or mutual expectations of how they would behave vis-à-vis one another. Everyone was encouraged to hold one another—and Reid—

responsible for achieving the Snack results.

Reid hasn't stopped here. He has already started to cascade the alignment process down through Snack, aligning teams below the vice-president level so they too can achieve the highest possible level of performance.

5. Show How It's Done

On high-performing teams, candor is king. Reid set the tone when he engaged in "straight talk" about Snack's failure to meet its sales goals, the removal of the unit VP, and the need for radical change. He encouraged the old and new members of his team to respond in kind. He told them that he wanted them to challenge him. "If I ask the seven people on my team if they agree with me, and all seven say 'yes,' I might as well get rid of six of them," Reid told his VPs. "I want to hear the contrarian view."

He went further. In front of his team, he is comfortable in challenging his boss when he feels things are moving too slowly, role-modeling the upward confrontation that he expects from them.

6. Park Your Ego

Leadership is not about "me," but "us"—and getting results. Effective leaders in a high-performance environment possess a special kind of self-confidence: the ability to admit to not having all the answers.

"Putting your ego aside and asking others to help find answers isn't something everyone can do," says Reid. "It takes a very strong person to relinquish control in the interest of finding the best solution." Such solutions come when leaders harness collective brainpower.

Testing Your High-Performance Leadership IQ

Leadership may be more art than science, but it remains a discipline. Those who have mastered that discipline understand that leadership involves moving their organization to new, ever-more-demanding levels of performance and creating an environment in which everyone wants to and can excel.

Take the following test to see how you measure up as a new high-performance leader:

1. Have you led the alignment effort to ensure everyone on the team is clear and committed to a common strategy and set of operational goals, to clear roles and accountabilities, to ground rules for decision making, and to transparent business relationships?
2. Do you require that your team act as if it were a mini board of directors, in which each team member puts aside functional self-interest and “owns” team results?
3. To what extent have you encouraged your team members to hold one another accountable for business success? To hold you accountable—and say so?
4. How attuned are you to the leader/player dynamic of each of your team members? Do you adjust your behaviors—directing, coaching, collaborating, empowering—to the needs of players and circumstances?
5. Do you cling to the old leadership story, “As the leader, I get paid to make the decisions?”
6. Do team members view you as answer man, night watchman, referee, enabler—or as a facilitator/coach?
7. Do you role-model effective leadership behavior in leading your team—and in how you manage upward, say, to your board of directors?
8. Think about the last time that a team member disagreed with you. Did you (a) say thank you and dispassionately assess the contrarian position, (b) use sarcasm, avoidance behavior, or seek rescuers from your team, (c) become unglued, or (d) press the eject button?
9. When was the last time you asked your team to assess your effectiveness as a leader who contributes to the team’s ability to reach high-performance goals and expectations?
10. When you look at your team, do you see leaders—or followers?

About the Author

Howard M. Guttman is principal of Guttman Development Strategies, Inc. (GDS), a Ledgewood, NJ-based management consulting firm specializing in building high-performance teams, executive coaching, and strategic and operational alignment. GDS has been selected as one of the top 15 independent consulting firms in the U.S. by Leadership Excellence magazine.

Among GDS's U.S. and international clients are Chico's; Coca-Cola; Colgate-Palmolive; Johnson & Johnson; Liz Claiborne; L'Oréal U.S.A.; Mars, Inc.; Novartis; Philip Morris; and Schering-Plough.

Mr. Guttman is the author of *When Goliaths Clash: Managing Executive Conflict to Build a More Dynamic Organization*. He is a frequent contributor to professional journals such as *Harvard Management Update*, *Human Resource Executive*, *The Journal of Business Strategy*, *Leader to Leader*, and *Pharmaceutical Executive*. He is a contributing editor to *Leadership Excellence* and is quoted frequently in the business press.

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