

## Leading in The New Normal

Last month, I spoke to six groups of CEOs and their key executives in Atlanta, Lexington (Kentucky), Grand Rapids (Michigan) and Richmond (Virginia). These leaders are members of Vistage International, the world's largest CEO membership organization ([www.vistage.com](http://www.vistage.com)).

We were reminded that in difficult times the role of a leader is more important than ever.

A leader may be a manager, but a manager is not always a leader.

A manager directs and monitors people and the work they do. A leader sets the vision and creates opportunities for people to contribute to the achievement of that vision.

Why is leadership more important than ever? Because while the future may be looking brighter, it's still uncertain. The workplace may be more active but people are still anxious. Normal routines have been turned upside down.

What if this is the New Normal?

### The Leader's Role

The best leaders define reality and inspire hope.

Life is not a multiple choice test. And leadership is not always black and white.

So while leadership does not come from a checklist, the following guidelines – reflecting insights from leaders I've visited with across North America – are timely reminders of things you can do to sustain a healthy, productive culture in your organization or department...which, after all, is the only thing within your sphere of influence.

1. **Remember that you're always in the spotlight.** Be mindful of the verbal and non-verbal signals you send. Be transparent -- the truth in tough times is more important than ever.
2. **Live your values.** Make your values visible. Your culture is the invisible hand of your values made visible in behavior. Does your culture match your values?
3. **Work from a written a plan.** If you don't have a plan, develop one. If you need to recalibrate your plan, do it. Be specific about defining success and be specific about every person's role in helping achieve it.

4. **Leave your foxhole.** Walk around to stay in touch with colleagues by asking questions and offering encouragement. Visit with customers and suppliers. Not everything that's important is found in a report.
5. **Monitor and measure performance.** How do we stack up against the competition? Are we satisfying our customers? Are there opportunities to upgrade our talent? You can't improve if you don't measure. Where are we coming up short? Fix it. Where are we winning? Replicate it.
6. **Shift accountability.** Growth is stymied by leaders' inability to delegate. Invest others with the personal responsibility to deliver results. Recognize and reward success. Address under-performance.
7. **Make changes fast.** In the last 30 days, I've asked more than 150 different leaders to name their biggest mistake of 2009. Their answer? Failing to act more quickly on a decision.
8. **Balance the present and the future.** Is your vision inspiring? Are your growth goals realistic? You can have your eyes on the Super Bowl, but you can only get there one game at a time.
9. **Celebrate wins.** In tough times, it's particularly important to recognize organizational and individual successes. Doing so acknowledges progress and encourages those achieving high levels of performance to continue pushing forward.
10. **Acknowledge that we don't control it all.** Let go of baggage that may be holding you back or getting you down. Lighten up (see #1 above). We don't control it all. We do, however, control our responses.
11. **Keep things in context.** No matter how bad you may have it, there are hundreds of people that would gladly trade their problems for yours. When possible, look for opportunities to do something for others outside your company. Doing so will be a blessing to you as well as to those you help.
12. **Don't go it alone.** It's lonely at the top. Develop a group of trusted advisors whose only agenda is your success. They will question your answers, offer encouragement and provide accountability so that you can continue to lead those that look to you for these same things.

Are you managing? It's time for leadership.■