



The Leading Edge

Leadership, Team & Organizational Effectiveness

July 2010 Issue No. 5

Farr Associates is a Leadership Development and Organizational Effectiveness consulting firm located in High Point, North Carolina. Farr delivers a range of services that improves performance by enhancing the quality of leadership at all levels of the organization.

Perspectives of the CEO

Mark Ernsberger
Farr Associates, President and CEO

Are You A Leader? (Look Behind You For The Answer)

No one's a leader if there are no followers...

Malcolm Forbes - Forbes Magazine

At Farr Associates, we have a very specific definition of leadership. And that definition is critical to understanding the approach we take in helping you achieve your business objectives through improved leadership. This definition is also at the core of determining if your organization and ours will have a "values match" and, therefore, a good chance of developing a successful partnership.

First of all, let's get something out of the way. Everything I say from here forward pertains to people in your organization who have the skills and abilities that we will assume are worth your while to keep inside the organization. At the very least, it would cost you more in time, energy and probably money to lose and have to replace them.

Now, what makes our leadership definition so different from other organizations? Perhaps the best way to put it is the way that Jim Farr defined it long ago: "Leadership is about creating followership." Does that confuse you? Here's another way to look at it: our definition of leadership is about finding and creating a "win-win" relationship between the leader and the follower. Followers come to their jobs with a certain set of values. Leaders also come to their roles with a certain set of values. The job of the leader is to find a way to link the values (and outcomes those values create) between themselves and the followers.

This differs dramatically from the way some other firms or gurus may define leadership. Most traditional views of leadership come from a hierarchical perspective. What that basically means is, "I'm the boss; you do what I say." Or, "I'm smarter than you, so I must always be right." And so forth. What is the problem with that view? Well, first of all, it essentially says, "My values are more important than yours." And while in the end that may be true, it does not make for a motivating environment for employees. Don't get me wrong, sometimes there may not be a match between employee and boss. In this case, it may be best to cut bait and move on. But we think most leaders probably resort to this option way too soon because they haven't developed themselves enough to be able to appeal to a larger set of personalities and situations that could be effective if given the chance. They come to their jobs with a rigid set of rules and the people who fit those rules stay and get rewarded and those who don't leave or get punished. Usually the adherence to these rules, and the justification for keeping them, is the result of a leader having used them so successfully in their last job. So motivation becomes a very linear one-way street for those leaders. It's also a very narrow street and doesn't allow for the most powerful type of leadership which I am talking about here.

Leadership Development

[Mastering Leadership Dynamics](#)

[Executive Coaching](#)

Team Performance

[Next Level Teams](#)

[Team Optimization](#)

Organizational Performance

[Leading Change](#)

Contact Farr

800-395-3277

[Contact Farr](#)

Leadership Quote:

The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it.

Theodore Roosevelt

Watch this quick video to learn about the power of [Conscious Leadership](#).

On the other hand, the leaders who see themselves as being on a journey of constant growth and discovery will understand that it is a test of their own development to see how many key people can be continuously motivated to move in the direction that the leader and the organization need for them to move in. This requires the leader to continuously develop new ways of thinking and acting that may be DIFFERENT from their own (but still effective). If they can't appreciate the unique strengths of their followers, they will never figure out how to create that vital win-win relationship with them.

There is another benefit to our definition of this type of leadership. The solutions that are created using this approach will be infinitely more complex, richer, and better than the solutions that are created from a linear approach to leadership. And that is a competitive advantage that can't be bought.

Thomas Hurley in his "Archetypal Practices for Collective Wisdom," speaks of an archetypal need (for a leader) to illuminate one's own truth. But he also speaks of a complementary need to engage in dialogue. "We recognize that any expression of truth is always partial and that our experience is always one thread in a larger tapestry. Through dialogue, what we know to be true is continually enriched and informed, sometimes reframed, by our casting the net of inquiry ever wider and more deeply."

At Farr Associates, we specialize in helping leaders develop themselves so they can appreciate as many divergent paths to the same outcome as possible. This, in turn, allows them to create the greatest number of followers and, therefore, the greatest leadership impact – so when you look behind you, you are surprised and delighted by what you find.

Leadership Awareness Challenge Story:

The Power of Open-Ended Questions

Steven M. Swavely, Ph.D.

"Let's just say I'm skeptical." That was the initial response from Jerry (not his real name), a recent program participant, as I questioned him about the facial contortions he made as he studied the Leadership Strategies Model™ I had just drawn out on the whiteboard. Jerry, an engineer by training, had risen in the ranks of his company first by working hard at every assignment he had been given. Once he was promoted to Project Director, he got results by turning into a hard-nosed manager who led by telling people what to do, and if necessary, running over people to achieve his goals. But his career was at a crossroads. His manager felt like he was technically capable of moving into a Department Director role, but his hard-nosed strategy and propensity to be abrasive with others was creating collateral damage. Peers and direct reports stopped trusting him, people grew fearful of giving him bad news, and some talented young engineers even requested to be moved from his team because of his management style. "I get results and that's what I'm paid to do," Jerry said. "Not to coddle people and be their best friend."

I could tell Jerry was missing the point, but simply telling him this would have created the very defensiveness in him that he consistently creates in others with his overbearing approach. When people get defensive they are reacting from a part of the brain not designed for effective problem solving or learning. So, I engaged him by simply asking him to say more about his thoughts. "Well, I just don't see how asking open-ended questions can help solve any of the problems my people bring to me. If they knew the answer, they wouldn't be asking me for a solution." Jerry's face was relaxing now. While still skeptical, having had the opportunity to present his point of view disengaged the reactive part of his brain and put him in a neutral state of mind where he was more likely to be receptive. Understanding how a person might come to his perspective, I asked Jerry to participate in a simple experiment with me. I asked him to think about his most pressing current engineering challenge and let me coach him through a process to see what might happen. "Are you serious?" he said incredulously. "What do you know about electrical engineering?" "Not a thing," I responded. "My dad was an engineer, but that's about as much as I know about engineering – so let's just see where this goes." Jerry was smiling now. "Hmmm, this will be interesting. Okay, here goes..."

Jerry proceeded to tell me of his engineering challenge, 90% of which I did not understand and virtually none of which I could repeat now. But what I did know is that by listening to his issues, reflecting on what I heard him say, and asking open-ended questions that helped me understand the challenge, I was also guiding him to look at the problem from different angles. As he thought about how to answer my barrage of questions, his face took on a serious and focused look. He began to think deeper and deeper into the issues and to look at it all from perspectives he had not previously considered.

At this point, I knew I had engaged the problem-solving part of Jerry's brain and that he was ripe for developing at least an action step he could take to solve his problem. After about 10 minutes of this questioning and clarification process, Jerry suddenly paused, then his face lit up as he experienced a sudden "ah-ha" moment, and his mouth formed a sheepish grin as he realized that the simple process of asking open-ended questions had led him to his own solution. "Wow. How'd you do that?" Jerry blurted out. Before I could say anything, his excitement about coming to a solution caused him to quickly continue. "Now I get it. In my rush to get results, and by my always having to give people the answer and to show them how smart I am, I rob them of the opportunity to feel good about contributing to a solution. You know what, it might be better if I didn't always know the answer, and even if I do, I need to let people experience the rewarding feeling of finding their own solution. And I bet that when it's their solution, they are more likely to be committed to trying to make it work. If I just tell them what to do, some part of them may be hoping it doesn't work so they can prove me wrong."

Jerry did indeed now get it. He better understood the value of using the Leadership Strategies Model™ to not only solve problems, but to develop excited, committed, and engaged team members who will collaborate in a way that creates a high performing team. He now realized that a team like this will run circles around one led by a hard-nosed manager who gets compliance, but not commitment, from their team. The real power of the model lies in how, with proper application, you can literally impact the state of mind, and even the areas of the brain, within your people in a way that can create results you would never have predicted. But like any skill, it takes practice. So be patient, but persistent, and over time your effectiveness as a leader will reach new heights.

Who will take your place?

The 2009 Top 20 Leadership Companies, as selected by Business Week, were 33.4% MORE LIKELY to believe they have a sufficient number of qualified internal candidates who are ready to assume leadership positions, as compared to companies surveyed from the S&P 500.

What does this likely mean for your organization? That creating a leadership development program not only establishes a strong organization for today's needs, but for the needs of the future as well.

Bloomberg Business Week/Hay Group 2009 Best Companies for Leadership Survey

Leadership Tip

A primary function of Leadership Teams is to solve problems. The hallmark of high-performance teams is a balance of high-quality solutions/decisions and speed of execution. The process that supports this is one through which the team intentionally moves in order to utilize distinct components of problem-solving: gathering enough data to understand the problem, developing innovative options that positively impact the problem, deciding on a plan of action for the selected solution, and determining the impact and communication strategies. The key is to be intentional throughout this process.