

Survey Report:

# **Achieving Peak Performance:**

The **challenges** companies face.

The **skills** executives need.

October, 2013

*Your leadership skills determine the level of your success--and the success of those who work around you.*

- John C. Maxwell

While the definition of leadership over time has not changed, the ways in which executives achieve high performance in leadership has shifted notably. Today it is common knowledge that how mid level and top management assert leadership has either a positive or limiting impact on their companies' performance and productivity. Consequently, organizations are increasingly investing in leadership development.

Between August 2013 and the beginning of October 2013, I have conducted surveys as well as formal and informal conversations with Fortune 500 executives, to identify the main challenges that, if overcome, will allow high-potential managers to achieve peak performance. Furthermore, I asked what skills are needed to meet those challenges.

### **Top challenges to achieve peak performance**

The first question in the survey asked respondents to identify the top challenges that if overcome will allow managers to achieve peak performance. I have assembled the answers in three main themes reflecting the prominence participants gave in the survey to the identified challenges:

- 1. Lack of communication and people skills to create a collaborative environment.** CEO as well as human resources executives highlighted that their managers are very competent in their own field of expertise, but often lack communicative and relationship skills that are fundamental to create a comfortable environment thus allowing all levels of employees to feel involved, to make their own contribution, and to encourage collaboration. Several of the top executives I engaged, spoke of limiting egos, stubbornness, and lack of openness to new ideas as some of the negative traits that undermine the performance of managers and their teams. Respondents also highlighted how lack of communication skills undermine effective customer relationship management. "Need for more effective collaboration," and "for effective communication with subordinates" were often mentioned in the answers.
- 2. A gap in personal and professional integrity.** John C. Maxwell once wrote that if an individual has integrity, his or her words and deeds match up. It is this level of integrity that CEO and human resources executives highlighted as being underdeveloped in their management. They spoke of gaps in alignment between their company's mission and goals and those of their managers. Some recognized that this gap is due to a lack of clarity in values either at an organizational level or a personal level. Respondents spoke of "lack of self-awareness" and of a need for "modeling organizational practices that are expected by others" as well as of "leading by example."
- 3. Lack of empathy.** The third challenge top executives identified, is the lack of emotional intelligence skills as the cause for their managers' underperformance. Respondents mentioned "difficulties in seeing beyond oneself," the need for managers "to be more accessible" and even a "lack of humanity" as some of the limiting patterns encountered in their management. This has repercussions not only for a

collaborative environment within the company but also in the relationship with customs and their level of satisfaction.

To summarize the top challenges, here are some of the direct quotes as provided by the respondents:

- *“Lack of clear and inspiring vision and mission”*
- *“Need for more emphasis on emotional intelligence”*
- *“Need to embrace and enhance a positive organizational culture as a matter of choice”*
- *“Respect for diversity in all forms”*
- *“Difficulties in inspiring and motivating team for sustainable peak performance”*
- *“Lack of cohesion between thoughts, words and actions”*
- *“Need for more effective collaboration”*
- *“Prioritization and focus on highest value creating solutions”*
- *“Need to develop the ability to streamline the collective vision of the organization with personal ambition.”*

## Essential skills needed to achieve peak performance

The survey's second question asked respondents to identify the skills that managers in a given company will need to develop in order to achieve high leadership performance.

Below is the ranking of the top five skills mentioned by the respondents:

1. Effective Communication
2. Empathy
3. Self-Management
4. Negotiation
5. Mindfulness

Other skills often mentioned by top executives were: emotional self-awareness, mediation and conflict management.



## Analysis of the Results

What emerged from the survey as well as from formal and informal conversations I had with top executives, is the direct **correlation existing between the identified challenges** that limit the performance and productivity of managers and their teams in a given organization, **and the skills required to close the gap**

**between desired performance and actual performance.** For example, the lack of communication and of people skills that top executives perceive are often missing among their managers, correspond to the perceived need for skills in effective communication, empathy and negotiation.

Furthermore, companies hire extraordinary talented individuals with extraordinary expertise in their field of competence, but have pay less attention to so-called soft skills that today research has demonstrated are key to maximize performance and increase productivity.

**More and more, companies feel the need to supplement the expertise of their managers with the development of soft-skills.**



The results that emerged from the survey are in alignment with the most **advanced leadership research**, which has highlighted how in an increasingly complex, uncertain and unpredictable environment, **high-potential managers today need to turn into great leaders** characterized by great discipline and great creativity, who are able to motivate, to inspire, to build relationships, to develop others; in other words, leaders who are open minded, who

encourage diversity and inclusion. **Great leaders today are not only good managers, but authentic people.**

A final observation is that the skills that top executives have identified as strategically key to achieve peak performance are **the skills that high-end mediators develop and employ** in often very intractable conflicts. What allows top mediators to make progress, to overturn a critical situation and to produce mental shifts in individuals and groups embedded in nasty conflicts, is their ability to listen attentively and emphatically, to reframe issues in a way that allows for the generation of new approaches and new solutions to the problems, to interrupt limiting patterns, and to elicit and to propose a menu of choices that encourages creativity and out of the box thinking. High-end mediators, who are successful in their intervention, are not erratic in their behavior, but operate from a space of careful discernment. **By modeling high-end mediators, top executives can learn the skills that will take them to peak performance and increased productivity, blending in a wise combination discipline and creativity, empathy and good judgement.**

## The Solution

Did any of the findings presented above resonate with your own observations and experience? Do you have managers that by developing leadership skills and by modeling high-end mediators would improve significantly their performance and productivity and increase their productivity? Are conflicts or a low collaborative environment affecting performance in your organization? conflict at times arises as a

consequence of a combination of the elements mentioned above? How well equipped are your managers to turn conflict into an opportunity for growth and innovation?

I am dedicated to help companies to upgrade their corporate and business culture. Building on 20-plus years of experience in conflict resolution and high-end negotiations, I assist high-potential managers, who want to achieve peak leadership performance by modeling top mediators and developing the necessary soft-skills.

I partner with my clients to design an intervention that will produce the desired results and behaviors, based on an initial assessment, which will serve as a baseline to design and to implement solutions.

In particular, I provide the following **strategic services**:

**One-on-One Coaching.** I assist senior managers to maximize their performance and increase their productivity by helping them to put their own values in alignment with their company's mission and vision. I help executives to discover and to leverage their strengths and at the same time to produce positive shifts in their mental models, to overcome disempowering beliefs and habits, and to improve their soft-skills. Responding to their needs, I help individuals to unlock their own natural leadership ability, to create and to maintain states of personal excellence, and to design well conceived, inspiring and attainable goals.

**Workshop: Effective Communication for Leadership.** In this workshop, managers and their teams learn how to communicate more effectively by strengthening their capacity in listening (not only how to listen, but also what to listen for), in conflict resolution and in negotiation. My clients learn how to elevate their influence by upgrading their communication and interpersonal skills, and by identifying and taking care of the human needs of colleagues, employers and customers.

If you are interested in exploring the opportunity for some customized leadership and executive coaching for your company, please do not hesitate in contacting me at:

Aldo Civico Coaching  
1032 Hudson Street, #3R  
Hoboken, N.J. 07030  
T. (800)492-0379  
Email: [aldo@aldocoach.com](mailto:aldo@aldocoach.com)

You can learn more about our work at:  
[www.aldocivicoaching.com](http://www.aldocivicoaching.com)

