

Executive **EDGE**

hp9601t.htm

THE SECRETS OF THEIR SUCCESS

What are the secrets to leaders' success? Successful leaders have concrete skills, such as keeping an eye on the bottom line. They are also adept at soft skills, like discerning employees' emotions. Effective leaders achieve employees' respect by uniting employees in common goals and empowering them to do what they must to reach those goals. "The trick is to make the soft stuff hard, to operationalize it," says Roger Enrico, vice chairman of PepsiCo.

Can a person learn to be a leader? "Leadership has to do with how people are," asserts management guru Peter Senge. "You don't teach peo-

ple a different way of being, you create conditions so they can discover where their natural leadership comes from."

Steve Kerr says that a variety of challenging assignments—with real responsibility and risk of failure—probably has a more profound impact on employees' leadership capabilities than formal training and education. Kerr is director of General Electric's Crotonville school, whose purpose is to transmit values to employees. GE spends \$500 million a year for formal employee training and education.

To help potential leaders get the experience they need, GE strives to link them to

appropriate jobs. Each year 80,000 staff members complete "internal resumes" that include information about their skills, career goals, and development needs. Senior managers then hold one-day personnel reviews to pair people with job assignments.

Other companies, such as Hewlett-Packard, believe



Chris McAllister

mentoring is the way to support future leaders. It views mentoring

relationships as friendships that allow young managers to grow. McKinsey, a consulting firm, sees mentoring as more of an apprenticeship.

McKinsey establishes teams in which senior people are expected to help junior people along. "If you know you have someone supporting you, you have much

more confidence. You don't have to stay in your comfort zone,"

says McKinsey junior partner David Friedman. "You can stay in your mentor's comfort zone, which is probably much bigger than your own."

Another way to help employees develop their leadership capabilities is through the 360-degree evaluation. In it a manager's boss, peers, and subordinates complete a questionnaire about him or her.

When used with care, data from a 360 can help a manager see—and learn from—his or her strengths and weaknesses. But 360s are also potentially dangerous because they can be used to enforce conformity.

From Stratford Sherman, "How Tomorrow's Best Leaders Are Learning Their Stuff," Fortune, November 27, 1995, pp. 90-102.

GENDER SPEAK

As women struggle to get ahead in the workplace, one of the many factors holding them back is their own style of speaking. In a male-dominated work environment, women's different communication rituals and style may make them seem less competent and self-assured than they are.

Boys and girls learn their linguistic styles in play groups, where girls' conversational rituals focus on building relationships and boys' focus on status. The resulting differences in communication show up in many different areas of adult interaction:

- Women are less likely than men to brag about their accomplishments.
- Women tend to downplay their certainty, whereas men minimize their doubts.
- Women are more likely than men to ask questions and to seek (or accept) advice.
- Women say "I'm sorry" more frequently than men as a ritu-

alized way of expressing concern.

- Women pay more compliments than men.
- Women tend to downplay their power, being more considerate of the feelings of subordinates and indirect when telling others what to do.

These and other linguistic differences often lead upper management to undervalue women and underestimate their confidence and strength. Training women to communicate more like men is not always the best solution, since each linguistic style can be effective in certain situations.

The answer is for managers to become sensitive to differing linguistic styles and ensure that all those with something to contribute get heard.

From Deborah Tannen, "The Power of Talk: Who Gets Heard and Why," Harvard Business Review, September-October 1995, pp. 138-148.