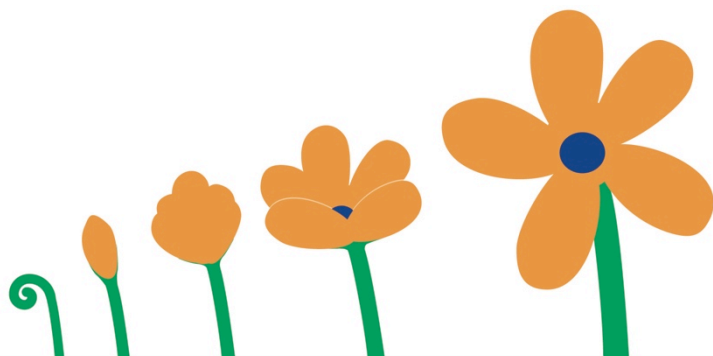




Growing engaging leaders

By Karen Schmidt
Workplace Gardener
Speaker . . . Workshop Leader . . . Facilitator

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Why you need engaging leaders

Extensive research on employee engagement in the last decade has revealed that the key to unlocking the discretionary effort that lies within your employees is simple: give them the right leader and engagement will occur naturally.

It has also been proven that those organisations that learn how to grow engaging leaders will reap the rewards in terms of:

Cost benefits

- Less staff turnover and lower recruitment costs
- Fewer accidents and injuries
- Avoid bullying and harassment claims
- Reduce sick leave

Innovation

- Easier to attract good people
- Improved teamwork
- Healthier workplace culture
- More focus on generating new ideas

Better results

- Less time spent fixing people issues
- Improved customer service
- Enhanced image in the market
- Increased bottom line results

It's one thing to know why you should do something and another to know how to do it! That's what this e-book is all about. It provides you with 10 keys to growing your managers into engaging leaders. I believe that if you apply these concepts the result will be a leadership team that flourishes and an organisation that is guaranteed to grow!

10 keys to growing managers into engaging leaders

1. You can't have engaged leaders in a poor culture
2. We pick people for leadership roles for the wrong reasons
3. New leaders need assistance and support
4. A leader in the wrong position can do damage
5. Bad habits from leaders rub off on their people
6. The right leaders provide staff with shelter from the organisational elements
7. You need to remove the barriers to help leaders grow
8. Sometimes leaders outgrow their role and need to move on
9. You always need to be cultivating new leaders
10. If leaders aren't growing they are dying

1. You can't have engaged leaders in a poor culture . . . and you can't grow plants in bad soil



Before a gardener even thinks about planting anything they prepare the soil. They know that if you put a strong plant in bad soil it will struggle to grow, never reaching its full potential and require lots of nurturing along the way.

In organisational terms, soil represents culture. Every organisation has a culture which is made up of their policies, procedures and practices. A culture can be overt or covert, official or unofficial, helpful or a hindrance.

What type of culture do you have . . . one that helps people to grow or does it stunt their development? How would you define your culture to an outsider using the four measures of:

Focus . . . what is important around here

Flexibility . . . how much do we have, who has it

Feedback . . . who gives, who gets it, what and when

Fun . . . do we have any, what does it look like

You need to develop a culture of engagement that supports the efforts of your leaders rather than one that works against them or even the most engaging leader in the world may not be able to survive and will definitely not thrive and grow.

2. We pick people for leadership roles for the wrong reasons . . . wrong plant in wrong location simply because we like it

If you have every tried to grow your favourite plant but didn't have the right location for it you will know how frustrating it is to watch it wither and die. Just because you like the look of a plant and have a blank space to fill doesn't mean you should go ahead and plant one.

So why don't we use the same logic with leaders?

We often throw people into a leadership role because we have a gap to fill, not because they are right for the job. We also choose people for leadership roles based on the wrong criteria. Standard practice is to select the technically most competent person and put them in charge, whether they like it or not. There are a few problems with this method . . .

- Technical competence does not necessarily equal leadership competence
- Making someone perform a leadership role against their will, regardless of their level of skill, is unlikely to result in success
- You have lost the skills of your best technician who is now focused on leading others instead of "doing the work"

The process of choosing a leader needs to be deliberate and well thought out because you can't afford to keep killing them off like houseplants! Engaging leaders are not easy to replace. Think of them as rare plants that are hard to find and expensive to acquire.



3. New leaders need assistance and support . . . plants need help to get established too

Whether you are planting a large, established tree or a tiny sapling, new plants often need some extra support to get off to a good start. Gardeners do this by staking the plant, protecting it with a wind break or covering it up to keep off frost or sun.

Someone new to a leadership role needs the same kind of support in the beginning. Gone are the days when we simply handed a new leader the keys to their office, a pile of work to be done and wished them luck.



Regardless of whether they have been a leader before, in your organisation or elsewhere, starting a new role is like being replanted. It can be a shock to the system but you can reduce the impact with the right support.

For leaders, that support can take many forms:

- A comprehensive induction program designed specifically for people in leadership roles
- Providing them with a thorough history of the organisation, its leaders and their team members
- Access to senior leaders within the organisation so they know what is going on and can more quickly feel part of the leadership team
- A leadership buddy they can turn to for advice and assistance in the early days on the job
- Immediate and ongoing professional development workshops, conferences and coaching

4. A leader in the wrong position can do damage . . . the wrong plant can potentially become a weed

Whilst vines that attach themselves to other plants to survive are common in nature, the result is usually the same . . . eventually the host plant is strangled by the vine. This can lead to death or at least greatly reduced growth. The same is true of an introduced species that takes over a habitat, robbing other plants of light and nutrients. No matter how attractive, it is the wrong plant in the wrong place.



The wrong leader in the wrong position can have the same impact. One of the goals of a leader should be to help their people to grow and develop, not to hold them back. Unfortunately, not enough leaders have the courage to let their people realise their full potential. Others have a habit of getting involved in issues that aren't really their concern which can cause stress to all involved.

"The ultimate leader is one who is willing to develop people to the point that they eventually surpass him or her in knowledge and ability"

Fred Manske

Leaders also need to be put in a position where they can do the most good. We know that some leaders are great at starting a team from scratch, others thrive when asked to get a team back on track and another group get enjoyment from keeping a well performing team in motion. You need to work to the leader's strengths rather than ask them to perform a role they are not naturally designed for.

5. Bad habits from leaders rub off on their people . . . like pests and disease move from plant to plant

Finding a plant infested with pests or disease is a warning sign to a gardener. They know that if they don't remove them quickly and destroy them properly, the problem will move elsewhere in the garden and quickly get out of control. Once pests take hold they can be very difficult to get rid of, requiring the use of expensive and potentially toxic chemicals or even the removal of whole plants.



You see the same situation in organisations. When leaders have bad habits they can quickly transfer to the employees. The spread can be difficult to control and it can take years to get rid of these habits if they become part of the cultural norms.

Some of the most invasive workplace diseases can develop from leaders who aren't engaged. They become territorial, sabotage change initiatives or start to play organisational politics instead of doing their real job. Fixing the resulting damage can take large investments of time, money and effort. Along the way there can be many casualties as good people leave, allowing the disease to really take hold.

You need to stop these bad habits from developing in the first place. Leaders in your organisation need to be role models. It doesn't mean they need to be perfect, it just means they need to admit to their bad habits, fix them and replace them with better habits.

6. The right leaders provide staff with shelter from organisational elements . . . like a tree shading smaller plants

A well designed garden includes plants that fulfill a number of different roles. One of the most important roles is performed by large trees that provide shelter and protection, allowing smaller plants to grow underneath them. However, if the trees provide too much shelter some of the undergrowth may not be able to get the nutrients it needs to develop so there needs to be a balance.

Leaders are the trees in organisations, shading employees from the ravages of the business. That's why they are paid more than their staff! Unfortunately, not all leaders see their role in that way. Instead, many of them leave their staff exposed to the elements by:

Expecting staff to make decisions they should be making

Using staff as scapegoats when they make mistakes

Passing off the ideas or work of staff as their own

Failing to support their staff when they really need help

Alternatively, some leaders go too far and provide too much shelter, inhibiting their staff from growing. This could be done in a well-meaning way, to protect them from difficult people or difficult situations, or it could be to deliberately keep them in the dark.



Either way, the result is the same . . . the leader creates a situation where people are unable to reach their potential. Just as a garden without a variety of plants is ineffective, so too is an organisation without staff.

7. You need to remove the barriers to help leaders grow . . . plants grow better when you give them space

Plants can't grow when they don't have enough space. When they are crowded out by others all competing for limited nutrients or light, only the strongest survive. We see this in a rainforest canopy as well as a suburban garden. The best gardeners know they need to give each plant its space and to also remove other barriers, such as rocks, that prevent the roots from really taking hold.



**“We need to give each other the space to grow,
to be ourselves, to exercise our diversity”
Max de Pree**

There is nothing worse than watching a promising leader fail to develop because they have too many barriers put in their way. In an organisational sense, the barriers that prevent your leaders from reaching their potential can include:

- Unclear goals and objectives
- Vague or constantly changing position descriptions
- Policies, procedures or practices that slow them down
- More senior leaders who “micro-manage”
- A lack of resources to effectively perform their role
- The legacy of past leadership decisions that prevent growth

8. Sometimes leaders outgrow their role and need to move on . . . sometimes plants need to be relocated to thrive

Gardeners sometimes make mistakes and plant the wrong tree in the wrong place. The result can be that its roots eventually push up the pathway or invade the drainage system. The same can happen with potted plants that outgrow their container. If they aren't taken care of they become root bound and slowly die.



When choosing leaders we can sometimes get it wrong, too, and find that we don't have the right environment for a particularly ambitious, high achiever. They eventually find themselves feeling constrained and unable to operate within the confines of the organisation. We have to be willing to let them go or risk watching them disengage.

Smart organisations have in place plans for dealing with these situations on a temporary or permanent basis, including:

- a secondment elsewhere in the corporation, perhaps even overseas
- an arrangement with a compatible enterprise to swap leaders so they can broaden their experience
- a “boomerang” policy that allows people to leave, gain more experience and return in the future when the circumstances are right

Another scenario involves the leader who is ready to move onto the next level in the organisation but has their promotion blocked. It could be for political reasons, because they are too hard to replace in their current role or because they are perceived as being too young for a more senior role. In all cases, leaving them where they are will almost certainly decrease their engagement, so think twice before letting this happen.

9. You always need to be cultivating new leaders . . . you need plants in all stages of development to keep your garden healthy

Experienced gardeners are realists. They know that a garden is a living thing and therefore constantly changing. Whilst the garden may look great today, they know it won't stay that way on its own. They are always looking to the future . . . taking cuttings, raising seedlings and looking for signs that new plant life is on the way.



Experienced leaders know they need to be always looking out for potential leaders of the future. They could be young people just starting out in their career or more experienced people who are ready and eager to move into leadership.

They prepare these budding new leaders by giving them informal opportunities to develop their leadership skills and by providing them with advice to help them on the path ahead. They know that new leaders bring fresh ideas to the organisation. So, instead of being fearful of them they welcome the chance to learn from their insights.

10. If leaders aren't growing, they are dying . . . the law of nature, especially when it comes to plants

Even people who have been gardening for decades are always looking for new and better ways to do things. They know that new plant species that are more productive and resistant to disease are being developed all the time. They also realise that you need to constantly keep working to maintain your garden. Whether it is watering, fertilising or mulching . . . the garden needs attention.

Leaders also need to be looking for new and better ways of doing things. They need to pay attention to the trends, keep up with the research and stay one step ahead in terms of engagement strategies.

A growing leader is someone who:

- Attends regular professional and personal development events
- Has a strong network of leadership contacts
- Gets involved in the relevant professional associations
- Keeps up with what is being written about leadership
- Takes on new challenges to grow their skills
- Assists aspiring leaders to bloom

If you aren't doing these things, you will be left behind and risk joining the ranks of the dying breed of managers who think they are leaders, but aren't really. Unfortunately, once a leader starts to shrivel up through lack of growth, it can be very hard to stop the process. The key is to always be growing.



Rating your performance

So how does your organisation rate in each of these 10 areas?

	Excellent	Good	OK	Poor
Culture				
Selection				
Support				
Right position				
Good habits				
Shelter				
Barriers				
Moving on				
New growth				
Always growing				

About the author



Karen Schmidt from Let's Grow! describes herself as a workplace gardener who is on a mission to grow managers into engaging leaders.

The seeds for her role as a speaker, workshop leader and facilitator were planted early in her career when she encountered disengaging managers and colleagues who were performing below their capabilities. In order to help people to not just survive but thrive at work, she made it her goal to grow herself into an employee engagement expert. Along the way she experienced the workplace from the point of view of a staff member, manager, recruiter, contractor and consultant working in organizations of all shapes and sizes.

To add to her 20 plus years of practical experience she has formal qualifications in Human Resource Management and Adult Education and is the author of two books.

Today she works with current and future leaders across Australia, New Zealand and Asia in a diverse range of industries to help them create more engaging workplaces. Her clients include corporates, government departments, SMEs, professional associations, educational institutions and community groups.

Karen continues to grow her knowledge base and practical experience through her membership of organisations such as the National Speakers Association of Australia, Australian Institute of Management and the Institute of Learning Professionals.

She has been recognised by the International Federation for Professional Speakers as a Certified Speaking Professional (CSP), the highest level of accreditation for speaker's internationally and held by only 10% of members. Karen was the winner of the National Speakers Association of Australia (NSAA) QLD "Speaker of the year" award in 2006.

In her spare time she likes to tend her own garden, volunteers at a community garden and grow her skills as a social ballroom dancer.