

How Should We Then Grow?

A New CMA Leadership Needs Survey Shows That Christian Managers at All Levels Both Want and Need Training and Development in the Fundamental Skills of Leadership and Management

By Dan Maltby and Ron Smedley



What's the most needed leadership skill among leaders and managers in ministries today? In a large-scale survey of Christian leaders, the clear answer to that question is team building. Regardless of one's role or level of responsibility in a Christian organization, managers said their subordinates and superiors alike needed the most growth in effectively leading a team.

When broken down further, managers ranked team building as the second most important skill set in which their subordinates needed further development, and the number one skill their superiors needed to develop (Exhibit A).

When evaluating themselves, however, these same managers believed team building to be only seventh in importance.

The need for team building skills is just one of several insights gleaned from the Leadership Needs Survey administered to members of the Christian Management Association (CMA) at a recent annual leadership and management conference. The survey was conducted by the Biola Leadership Project, with the support of CMA, in order to better understand the leadership needs of the Christian community of leaders and managers.

Team Building Doesn't "Just Happen"

Organizational leaders can learn much from these managers' assess-

ments. First of all, as noted above, not enough is being done in many organizations to create effective teams. Team skills in the workplace don't come naturally in the American culture and we should not assume they'll come any easier because it's a "Christian organization." The good news is that team building and team leading are learnable behaviors that can be measurably improved in most people.

The second question in the survey was: What amount of training have your people had in how to lead a team? Scripture is replete with wisdom about the importance of teams. Apparently, however, far too many Christian organizations today are assuming that "teamwork just happens" under the love of Christ.

Managing Time Is Still Fundamental

Another survey insight is the need for more effective time-management training. This fundamental skill ranked near the top for everyone, from first-level supervisors to vice presidents. Christian managers seem to think we're all in need of at least a refresher course. As workloads increase, managers seem to be saying that one way to relieve the pressure is to keep learning how to do things smarter, and in a manner that brings about "minimum effort for maximum results." Too many of us may be overlooking these basics in our search

for the more "exotic" techniques and tools of leadership.

What we see in ourselves is not necessarily what others see in us. Christian managers shared that their single greatest felt need was growing spiritually. Yet, through dozens of permutations based on role, organizational size,

Exhibit A

The subordinates' greatest needs were:

1. Problem solving
2. Team building
3. Managing time
4. Developing as a leader
5. Embracing change

Their immediate superiors' greatest needs were:

1. Team building
2. Team leading
3. Strategic planning
4. Assessing performance
5. Communicating interpersonally

Christian managers' own leadership needs were:

1. Growing/Developing spiritually
2. Developing as a leader
3. Managing time
4. Strategic planning
5. Mentoring
6. Managing Conflict
7. Team Building

church or parachurch, and many other data slices, these same managers never once ranked the need to grow spiritually as an important factor they saw in their superiors or subordinates. One can conclude that we're not seeing the spiritual hunger or feelings of spiritual inadequacy in those around us, yet in our own life it's a dominant felt need.

In our rush to fulfill the "mission," it would appear many managers are not feeding themselves or providing the environment in which their fellow workers can find confidence in their own spiritual development. We're overlooking a big need that's crying out in most of us, but is largely unspoken among us.

When managers were asked to pick the items they personally felt were most needed in themselves for further development—that is, after growing spiritually—those holding titles ranging from supervisor through director chose the following as most important:

- Managing time
- Managing conflict
- Developing as a leader
- Mentoring
- Delegating

When asked to assess these same supervisors and directors, their superiors (those with titles such as vice president) agreed with their subordinates that they needed developing as leaders and in managing time, but ranked the following as more important to their development than what they had chosen for themselves:

- Problem solving
- Team building skills
- Creating/managing processes
- Embracing change

When asked about their own needs, those same upper-level managers, like their subordinates, also chose growing spiritually, developing as a leader, and managing time as big needs, and then added the following to their top needs list:

- Strategic planning
- Using information technology
- Team leading

Those reporting to vice presidents (directors, supervisors, managers) agreed in part with what the vice presidents had to say, but then made their own list of vice presidential needs:

- Assessing performance

Exhibit B

Checklist for Assessing Leadership Development Needs

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Team Building | <input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing Time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Delegating | <input type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving | <input type="checkbox"/> Anticipating Opportunity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strategic Planning | <input type="checkbox"/> Decision Making | <input type="checkbox"/> Creating & Managing Processes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creating a Vision | <input type="checkbox"/> Growing/Developing Spiritually | <input type="checkbox"/> Embracing Change |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vision Casting | <input type="checkbox"/> Developing as a Leader | <input type="checkbox"/> Assessing Performance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Team Leading | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing Change | <input type="checkbox"/> Using Information Technology |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listening | <input type="checkbox"/> Communicating Interpersonally | <input type="checkbox"/> Analyzing Needs and Problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Managing Conflict | | |

- Communicating interpersonally
- Managing conflict

Presidents and CEOs said their vice presidents most needed team building skills and development as leaders, and added:

- Assessing performance
- Fund raising
- Problem solving

When asked about their own biggest needs, presidents and CEOs chose growing spiritually, developing as leaders, and strategic planning (the same as managers with titles of vice president), but also ranked among the top six those skills that reflected their unique responsibilities:

- Developing a board of directors
- Vision casting
- Fund raising

Differing Views

An important observation is that, to some degree, managers and their superiors are not on the same page regarding needs. The managers may think their needs are managing time, managing conflict, delegation and mentoring. However, their superiors view problem solving, team building and embracing change as their subordinates' greatest needs.

Are the bosses off base and out of touch, or do they have a perspective managers don't have? Leaders need to listen to their direct reports and find out what their subordinate managers "believe" they need, as well as the reverse. This will go a long way in reducing the resistance to training and development.

When comparing church and parachurch differences, there was greater similarity in these areas than in any other biographical or demographical

comparison in the study. Twenty-one percent of the survey participants were in church ministries, yet they reported experiencing similar needs as their brothers and sisters in parachurch ministries. Team building and managing time were still the highest chosen needs overall, and strategic planning and mentoring were dominant choices, both personally and for subordinates and superiors.

This is an interesting point. The survey would indicate that if you're in the

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same level of management/leadership, regardless of whether in a church or parachurch, you'll tend to have similar development needs. The context may be different, but the needs for leadership development are similar.

Assessing Development Needs

Of the 38 items listed in the survey, 22 dominated the selections, representing the pool of items on which survey respondents tended to focus. These 22 items (Exhibit B) should be a beginning checklist for assessing leadership development

needs within Christian organizations.

Clearly it has been shown that, regardless of the biographical and demographic dividers, Christian managers at all levels both want and need training and development in the fundamental skills of leadership and management. As the survey demonstrated, one does not need look beyond the basics of time management, analyzing and solving problems, and team leading/building for places where people need further help.

The survey results may encourage dialogue between middle and senior

management to do a needs assessment of their organizations, to find those leadership and management skills and knowledge bases necessary to climb over whatever barriers may be limiting their growth.

Identifying the needs is the first piece in the leadership development puzzle. Now the larger task is to undertake the equipping of ministry leadership. Our biggest challenge as Christian leaders is to invest some of our precious resources in developing our future leaders, rather than spending them all on the "urgent" needs that always appear to be upon us.

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How the Study Was Done

Four hundred fifty-six (456) attendees at the Christian Management Association annual conference completed the Leadership Needs Survey (representing approximately 30 percent of the conferees and eight percent of the CMA total membership). When compared to the population attending the conference and the organization's total membership, the sample was deemed to not be significantly different from either of the larger groups on the named demographic variables.

Respondents were asked to select, from a list of 38 items, the leadership skills, concepts and knowledge bases they believed to be most needed for further development by: (1) those reporting directly to them (subordinates); (2) their immediate supervisors; and (3) themselves. Additionally, 11 biographical and demographic factors were surveyed.

For an expanded version of the survey results, including how to use the data with your management team, go to www.biola.edu/leadership.

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