

## *Eleven Leadership Skills That Ratchet Up Performance*

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Good performance cannot be compelled, commanded or coerced. Performance systems created in law or by central management are attempts to compel performance, and basically don't work. When public employees are required to follow numerous processes, their devotion to the processes often displaces their devotion to results. Instead of "making managers manage" or "letting managers manage," organizations can "help managers manage."

Instead of focusing on systems, government should focus on leadership.

If we change the condition within which public managers must work – by creating either better incentives or more flexibility – existing managers will significantly improve organizational performance. To help managers ratchet up performance, they need better practices. The approach outlined below is not a rule, a requirement or a system. Rather, these 11 practices do the following: create a performance framework, mobilize an organization's resources, and teach how to improve performance.

**Creating a performance framework.** The historical approach of getting-all-of-your-ducks-lined-up-before-you-do anything can take a lot of time. Rather, to create a performance strategy, an organization's leaders need to "get it up and running and then fix it." Here's what you should do:

- #1. Articulate the organization's mission so everyone in the organization understands the big picture.
- #2. Identify what key failures would keep your organization from achieving this mission, looking at inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes.
- #3. Establish a specific performance target for closing the identified deficit.
- #4. Clarify the theoretical link between target and mission, so you have a model that explains how meeting the target will help accomplish the mission.

**Driving performance improvement.** Having created their performance target, leaders have to convince the people in the organization to work intelligently and energetically to achieve this target. Here's where you mobilize the resources of your organization:

- #5. Track and publish performance data so that every team knows that the leadership knows (and that everybody else knows) how well every team is doing. Of course, no team can succeed unless the organization's leaders provide their teams with whatever they need to achieve their targets.
- #6. Build your organization's operational capacity, which might include money, people, training, technology and production systems, and the cooperation of essential partners.
- #7. Once performance targets are established, recognize and appreciate what teams accomplish.

#8. Create “esteem opportunities,” that is, give people the opportunity to take pride in real achievement.

**Learning to Enhance Performance.** Unfortunately, achieving the performance target does not guarantee that the organization achieves its mission. The leaders in an organization need to verify that people are pursuing their targets in ways that do further the mission. So:

#9. Identify the need to check for distortions in which achieving the target may not have contributed significantly to accomplishing the mission.

#10. Analyze a large number and a wide variety of indicators to determine whether or not your performance strategy is truly furthering your mission.

#11. Learning from your results --by checking for distortions, evaluating mission accomplishment, and analyzing numerous indicators -- accomplishes little. You need to *act* on this learning and make the modifications necessary to ratchet performance up another notch.

So, if you choose to jump on the performance treadmill—these 11 better practices offer one approach that you can employ to exercise performance leadership. ■

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## Resources

Robert D. Behn, “[Performance Leadership: 11 Better Practices That Can Ratchet Up Performance](#)” (IBM Center for the Business of Government) 2006.

Judith Michaels, “[Becoming an Effective Political Executive: 7 Lessons from Experienced Appointees](#)” (IBM Center for the Business of Government) 2005, 2nd ed.

Joseph Ferrara and Lynn Ross, “[Getting to Know You: Rules of Engagement for Political Appointees and Career Executives](#)” (IBM Center for the Business of Government) 2005.

Mark Abramson and Paul Lawrence, editors. [Learning the Ropes: Insights for Political Appointees](#) (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers) 2005.

Mark Abramson and Kevin Bacon, editors. [Leaders](#) (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers) 2002.

*For more information, contact John Kamensky at [john.kamensky@us.ibm.com](mailto:john.kamensky@us.ibm.com) or (202) 515-4102..*

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