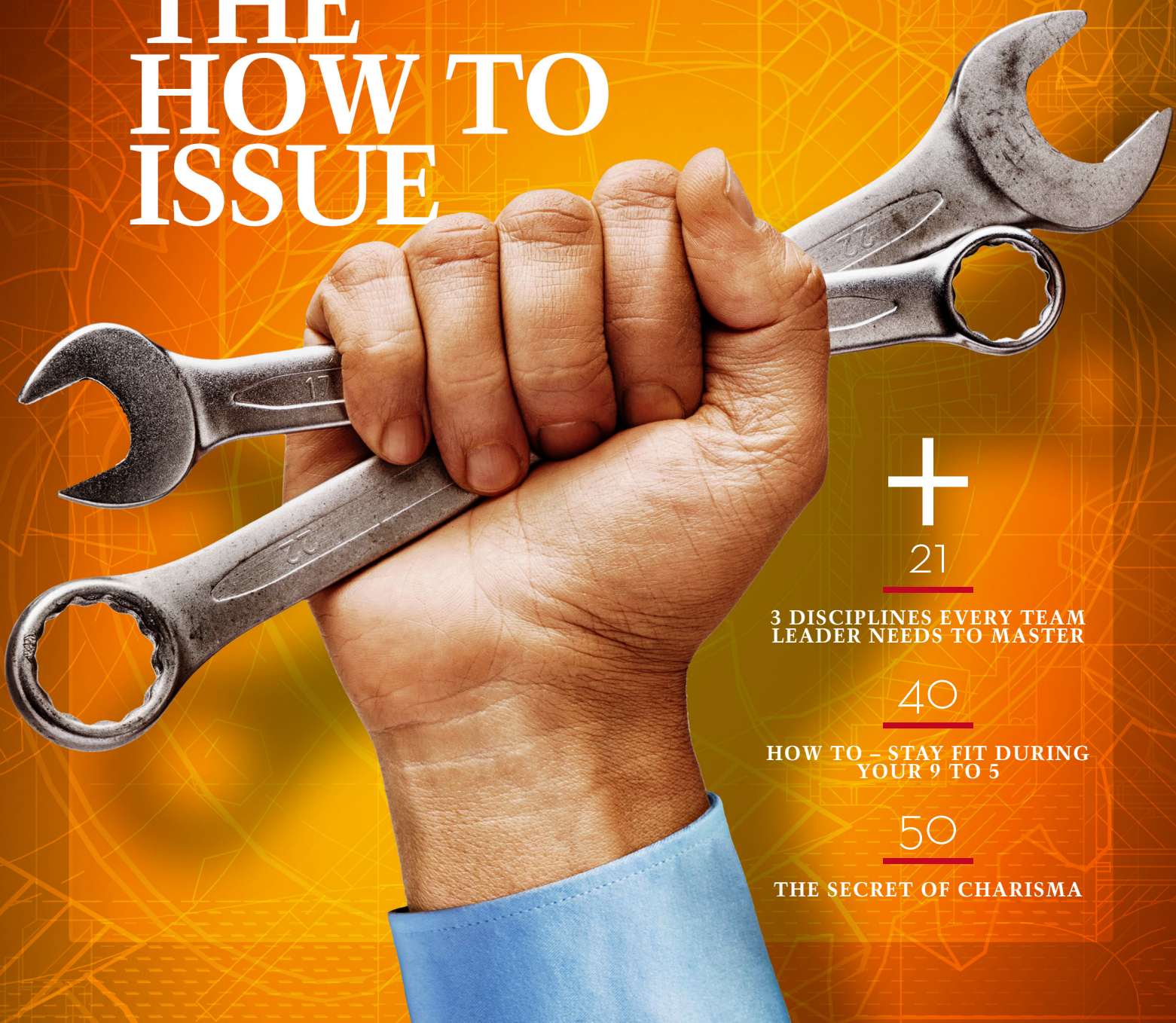# Business

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THE SECRET OF CHARISMA

Developing Superior Executive Teams

BY DEBBIE MASON, APR, CPRC, FELLOW PRSA

COMPANIES DON'T OFTEN TAKE THE TIME to assess and analyze the components of what makes their executives a superior versus weak executive team. Yet, organizations that understand their strengths and weaknesses as an executive team can choose to address the gap areas to remedy poor performance.

In a recent Center for Creative Leadership survey of senior executives, 65 percent indicated that their executive teams were experiencing a clash between functional and enterprise accountabilities. Sadly, only 18 percent rated their team as "very effective" with respect to their executive team responsibilities.

In my consulting practice, I've seen some earth-shattering level improvement of individuals and collective team growth and development after using a very effective measurement tool called the Work of Leaders™. This instrument assesses individual and collective executive team performance in the three key leader requirements – vision, alignment and execution.

The assessment report and the accompanying program clearly demonstrate the behavioral performance of the individual executives and the collective team in each of the three areas. For example, some leaders and teams are very effective at creating and articulating a vision where the company needs to go – but not so effective at creating alignment to inspire employees to come along. Sometimes you learn that some of those folks not rowing the boat together are actually executive team members who aren't in alignment!

I often work with organizations that are excellent at getting results based on their strategies to execute and reach goals, but the cost of getting there can create significant frustration and turnover, or worse – passive aggressive behavior that poisons the culture and makes going to work miserable for a lot of people.

It is a rare leader, or even an executive team, that is effective at all three areas based on the first assessment we do. However, over time, executive teams and individuals can shore up their areas of weaknesses, creating new behaviors that stimulate the right approaches and responses.

The key to shoring up those weak areas is a commitment to identify, practice, model and ingrain new behaviors personally as leaders and collectively as a leadership team. This creates a culture shift or adjustment and needs to be effectively and openly communicated.

Why is this important – because the culture of the executive team is the culture of the organization. Employees emulate the behaviors they witness among organizational leaders.
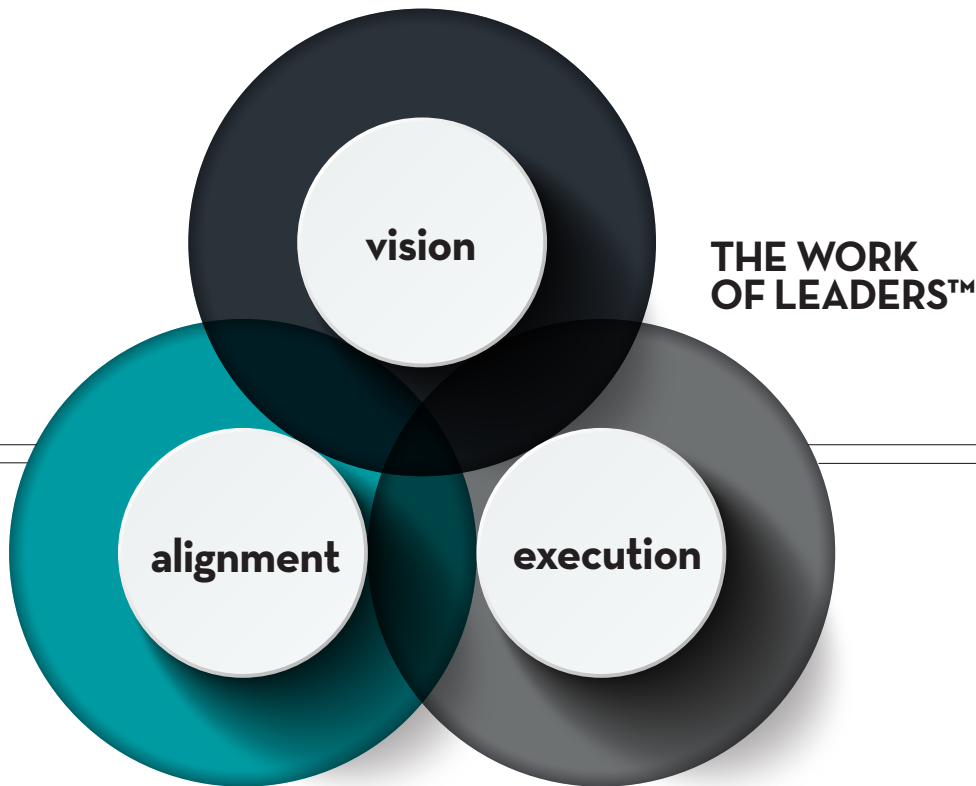
I worked with a mid-size corporate organization working with employees to conduct an employee opinion process, and then middle managers to conduct focus groups and input sessions to respond to employee concerns. Right away it became clear, based on the comments of the managers, that the real dysfunction the company was facing was because of the poor dynamics at the executive team level. In a meeting with the CEO and HR leader, the two confirmed that indeed the relationships at the executive level lacked trust at best, and at worst, were toxic in a couple of situations.

After 12 months of facilitated learning, hard personal growth work, coaching and support of one another this team's trust in each other changed dramatically. And, some changes had to be made by the CEO about those sitting at the table. Not surprisingly, the opinions of the middle managers shifted positively - as did the satisfaction of the entire workforce!

We Get That It Needs to Be Done - Now How Do We Do It?

START WITH THE EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM AND ASSESS YOUR LEVEL OF TRUST WITH ONE ANOTHER. Do you really have a culture in which people can disagree and move on with trust in one another? Is everyone headed in the same direction, even if that direction is not necessary what everyone wants? Is everyone direct, honest and fair in his or her communications? Patrick Lencioni's program ' The Five Behaviors of A Cohesive Team' is another great tool for executive teams to use and learn together.

THE WORK OF LEADERS™

In a recent Center for Creative Leadership survey of senior executives, 65 percent indicated that their executive teams were experiencing a clash between functional and enterprise accountabilities. Sadly, only 18 percent rated their team as "very effective" with respect to their executive team responsibilities.[1]

ASSESS HOW WELL YOU CREATE AND ARTICULATE A COMPANY VISION.

Is it clear? Is it compelling? Is it doable? Have you created the right team to spread the word clearly, consistently and concisely?

Develop specific strategies and behaviors for creating alignment and support from employees and other critical audiences to come on the journey with you to reach the goals that will get you to the vision you've articulated.

IDENTIFY AHEAD OF TIME POTENTIAL ROUGH PATCHES IN THE JOURNEY and bring in resources to prepare for those – be it new training for executives or other employees, coaching, mentoring or tools.

Everyone is different, which means they respond differently to change. Remember that many employees feel as though change is frightening and almost paralyzing. When possible, communicate often, in advance and offer encouragement and support so people feel comfortable voicing their feelings.

MAKE SURE LEADERS WALK THE TALK and that their personal and collective behaviors mirror the values of the company. When boundaries are crossed, make sure the culture is such that peer leaders can call them on that behavior and that it is addressed and remedied swiftly.

CARVE OUT TIME TO SPEND AS A TEAM – IN SOCIAL AND WORK SETTINGS. The better you know and like one another, the easier it is to be open to trusting one another.

Develop growth plans for everyone – including executive team members and take those seriously.

COMMUNICATE – and share the journey with your employees. This creates respect and trust by demonstrating that senior leaders can identify their own problems and address them.

GET OUTSIDE HELP. It is very difficult to do this without an outside guide to keep you honest, focused and accountable.

GET STARTED. It's never too late to be the change you know your organization really needs. Once you do it, you will wish you had done it sooner.

CONTINUE THE LEARNING. Your consultant can recommend books, experiences and opportunities for more learning and the team members can share their individual perspectives to reinforce the process. **B**

ABOUT THE WRITER

DEBBIE MASON, is a consultant who provides executive and organizational development, strategic planning and governance consulting for organizations. Her firm uses a number of assessments, coaching and training tools to achieve individual executive and collective team growth.

1 Center for Creative Leadership 2017, Are You Getting The Best Out of Your Executive Team https://www.ccl.org/articles/white-papers/getting-best-executive-team/