

The changing face of leadership - how can coaching help leaders prepare for the upturn?

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Few of us have witnessed such uncertain times. For the majority, the pace and scale of change are unprecedented in recent living history. This is surfacing new challenges for leaders, leadership and their organisations. Declan Woods discusses the impact the recession has had on leadership, how leaders can prepare their organisations for the upturn and the role of leadership coaching in today's economy.

Impact of the recession on leadership

The recession has impacted on both leaders and leadership alike. With the tenure of senior leaders shrinking, and leaders becoming ever-younger, the enormity of the current downturn in the economy is a first-time experience for many leaders.

While it's easy to offer banal, one-size fits all views on the economy, there are a number of themes Penna's Board and Executive coaches are witnessing in their work coaching senior leaders in public and private sector organisations. While there are always sector-specific challenges, cost cutting and downsizing seem commonplace; innovation has become stifled; mindsets towards new opportunities constrained and command and control, reactive behaviours are typical responses to market uncertainties.

The themes and focus of much of Penna's coaches work is therefore helping leaders to make sense of the unknown, provide clear direction and communicating clearly to their teams and organisations, making bold decisions and providing visible leadership.

These challenges manifest themselves in leaders' operating style too. Here, the leadership challenges are in developing emotional intelligence (self-awareness and impact on others) motivating self and others, and being inspiring yet authentic at the same time.

Coaching can make a practical difference to leaders in all these areas.

How can leaders prepare organisations for upturn?

Despite budget cuts, our coaches are in increasing demand, as leaders look for personal support and professional development during tough times.

With individuals, we are witnessing a greater acceptance of change and the need for flexibility and, as markets are picking up, confidence of their worth and willingness to change jobs. There is a heightened questioning of their employer's values and how these align with their own.

In turn, organisations are focusing on building for the future with more emphasis on staff attraction, engagement and retention. More encouragement is evident in stimulating innovation and developing new products and services.

All these issues are presenting different leadership challenges. Beyond awareness, a real quandary for many leaders is how to respond to them.

What does successful leadership look like?

Leadership in the emerging world is looking very different from leadership in a downturn. Enlightened organisations are putting in place the resources now for a new future: career development coaching has replaced outplacement coaching; leadership programmes and resources for leaders to help embrace performance and build new skills are seen as critical; rapid impact coaching due to increased job mobility is more wide-spread.

Supporting leaders as they move away from cost-cutting and downsizing towards innovating, creating and growing is the new world order. Inspiring, collaborative, trust-based leadership are the new facets of leadership. The future looks bright.

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