

Four Imperatives to Value Creation at Every Level

by Joe Hunt

Amongst the countless variables that determine success on the job, the least differentiating is your technical or functional competence. Talent management, building and maintaining an all “A” player dream team, is by far the #1 most important of the top ten macro measures. Foundational to everything are four key imperatives for leaders in our current environment. Whether you’re an executive in a multi-national or a middle market PE portfolio company, these imperatives dovetail with the changes sweeping through all organizations today. Let’s look at the four imperatives and why they must be addressed.

1. Thinking More, Learning More

Thinking about the current performance and future direction of your business or function has to include major economic trends, geopolitical events, currency fluctuations, new competitors, global best practice, rapidly evolving technology that is changing how we work, consumer preferences in many countries, and so on. Specific needs associated with your products, customers, suppliers, competitors, likely new market entrants, and your workforce change how you look at the world, not whether you should look at it. We all have to consider a wider range of variables. Learning about the world around us requires time every day.

Fortunately, we have computers and the Internet to help with information flow and retrieval. Although we cannot trust it implicitly, information is plentiful throughout the internet of things. Before we make decisions, however, this information must be validated by firsthand experience, personal observations, and input from trusted sources. We also have to think carefully about what the information means once we are satisfied it is valid, since the context in which we work has changed.

Thinking takes time. The more variables we must consider, the more time we need to think. As you no doubt are aware, leaders lack thinking time. Meetings from morning to night, one hundred or more e-mails per day, voice mail, family demands, and travel are the norm. Thinking deeply and reflectively under these conditions is difficult. We become caught in “activity traps” and thus fail to think and learn.

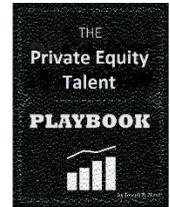
THE FIRST IMPERATIVE: Every leader spends thirty minutes to one hour or more daily in uninterrupted thought.

I call this activity my “hour of power” and virtually without exception invest an hour first thing in the morning in uninterrupted thought and engage in a “mindfulness practice.” I carry a spiral notepad and write what I want to think about and/or problems I want to work on solving at the top of the page and just write whatever ideas flow.

2. New Methods for Almost Everything

It isn’t an exaggeration to say that most businesses need new methods for just about everything they do—a rapidly changing environment demands it. Unfortunately, most companies are better at squelching new ideas than they are at encouraging them. Think about what happened to the last new idea you or each direct report put forward. How long ago was it? How was it received? What was the result? How do you feel about putting forward another new idea?





In the midst of all the chaos that exists in most companies, new ideas often aren't heard. Loud, powerful voices defend the status quo at strategy and budget meetings. There isn't enough time for creative thinking, and even if there is, the culture or management may eschew the risk that comes with "new." So, we do the same old things but perhaps a little cheaper or a little faster. It is so much easier to just keep doing what we did yesterday.

THE SECOND IMPERATIVE: Everyone must innovate as a natural and expected part of one's daily routine.

3. Clarity of Role and Purpose

When people show up for work, they should know what is expected of them, when it is due, what the cost should be, and what standards must be met. Everyone wants to know these things. Management practices commonly used now don't deliver role clarity. In fact, many current practices confuse rather than clarify.

While balanced scorecards are valuable frameworks for directing and measuring team or business performance, they don't tell individuals what they should work on and are usually silent on leadership work. Strategy is critically important for the business but generally doesn't naturally penetrate to lower levels. Strategy needs to be translated downward, level by level, but seldom is. Lower levels are left with the responsibility for interpreting what their contributions should be. Several recent studies on this subject concluded that employees at the bottom are more likely to do what they have been doing even if it doesn't fit the strategy. Goals and key performance indicators (KPIs) tend to be operationally focused or financially oriented. They are great as far as they go, but softer parts of leadership work don't often make the list. This fact has exponential opportunity cost impact.

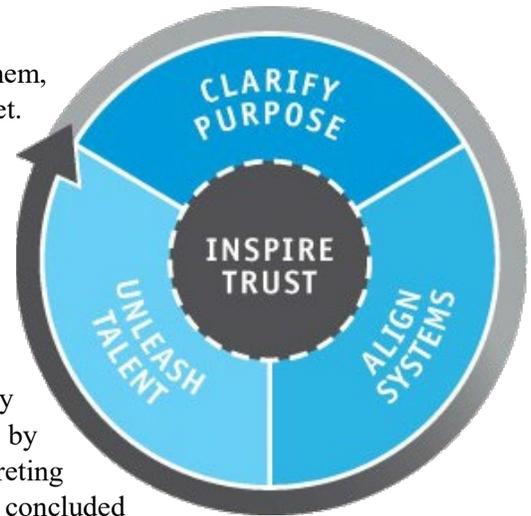
Company programs for developing leaders are designed generically and focus on corporate citizenship. They don't help much with clarifying the role and purpose of an individual job. How to do your specific job is rarely taught.

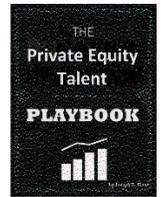
THE THIRD IMPERATIVE: Leaders must provide true role clarity and purpose for every employee.

4. A Focus on Delivering Value

Leaders who are tied up all day in meetings, who spend their time "doing," and who work at the level they came from, or even lower, rather than at the level to which they are assigned, don't add enough value. They can't possibly engage properly with their people. As a consequence, the priorities are often unclear or nonexistent for their teams. The proper focus required to deliver the right results at the right time in the right way is missing. Extraneous or simply urgent matters override important work. Well-meaning and motivated employees do what they think is right, but it often is disconnected from what really adds value.

Electronic traffic—e-mail, voice mail, instant messages, and the like—provides speed of communication. It also destroys concentration and focus. Our lives, both at work and at home, are overrun by these electronic intrusions. It seems that any electronic message or phone call is more important than what is going on face to face or what you are doing by yourself. It has never been harder to focus for an extended period than it is right now. It also seems that communication between leaders and their people has never been worse.





Some highly regarded management tools and Human Resource programs actually cause focus to be on activity rather than results. Competency models are widely used and accepted. In their original form they were meant to spell out how specific job families were to achieve specific results under specific circumstances. Now they are generally applied to all job families and are completely disconnected from results under specific circumstances.

THE FOURTH IMPERATIVE: Leaders must create an environment where sufficient focus is achievable, and value can be created.

Start applying these four imperatives and stay in touch to learn more about how the *LeaderShift* Architect and Enterprise GPS can help you and your organization achieve sustainable success now and in the future.

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