

## MANAGEMENT BY WONDERING ALOUD

Though much is questioned about the quality of management and leadership in American corporations today, the debate has produced little consensus about solutions. Blamed is everything from the global economy to the individual greed of executives just holding on for a golden handshake.

Through this bleak terrain gushes a river of advice from books, seminars, videos, consultants, journalists, professors, and charismatic CEO's. Though nearly everyone has something to say about how to fix our companies, surveys and candidly expressed opinions continue to indict American management and leadership.

And if that weren't bad enough, the methods for locating, recognizing, and nurturing management talent are under question too. Melvin Sorcher, author of *Predicting Executive Success: What It Takes to Make It Into Senior Management*, estimates that only one-third of today's executives fully meet their companies' expectations. He believes this is because most selection criteria don't tell us enough about how well the executive will perform in the future.

At a recent seminar on succession planning convened by Korn/Ferry International, Mobil Oil's vice president for employee relations, Rex Adams, said, "When your company's cash flow equals the gross national product of a country the size of Belgium, you care a lot about who is running it. You select and develop executives with great care."

These days, companies feel pressure to produce not just executives but leaders. And not just ordinary leaders, but leaders who will change the company for the better and do it fast. But as several people remarked at that succession planning seminar, how can an executive groomed and seasoned in a company's values be expected to undertake the sort of creative destruction needed to produce real change?

The selection of leaders is highly risky. It involves choosing someone on the basis of the present to perform in the future; someone to safeguard the company's legacy even while changing it; someone to have a vision for the company and also make it happen. It is a search for hidden and paradoxical talents.

The development of managers, executives, and leaders is one of the most preoccupying issues of the HRD profession. This is confirmed by numerous surveys, including our latest reader survey.

It is an issue we will cover in depth this year. We began in January with an article by Geoff Bellman on a neglected art—staff leadership. In February, Eugene S. Andrews and James L. Noel, took a critical look at the utility of case studies in executive development, and Jeffrey Kantor reported on what execs are returning to school to study. In March, Kenneth Graham Jr. and William Mihal covered management development needs analysis. In May we looked at visionary leadership through the eyes of author Marshall Sashkin.

In this issue you will read about a learning adventure that puts executives at the helm of a sailboat and tests leadership skills on the spot. July will feature key excerpts from a major new book, *The Transformational Leader*, by Noel Tichy and Mary Anne Devanna. It covers their experiences with companies such as General Electric, IBM, Honeywell, AT&T, Chase Manhattan Bank, and Citibank.

Some say the logic of economic growth will correct leadership problems no matter what grids, models, matrices, and rules of thumb are applied. In the meantime, we intend to keep on examining the dimensions of the leadership crisis and to keep on looking critically at some of the solutions proposed by those willing to wonder aloud.



Editor