

Preparing the Next Generation

By Michael Laff

THERE ARE A LOT of headaches that keep managers awake at night, from keeping staff members engaged in their work to charting effective growth and staying ahead of the competition.

Yet over the past three years only one issue has caused an increasing amount of concern: the skills gap, according to one survey. An annual corporate issues survey conducted by The Ken Blanchard Companies of San Diego asked training and development officers to cite their greatest concerns on the job. More than 800 individuals participated.

Survey results indicate that concerns about skills shortages are even more acute today than four years ago as 43 percent of all respondents cited the skills shortage among the top three business challenges of 2006. That is up from 34 percent in 2003. While other categories were cited more often by respondents, the skills shortage was the only category that increased annually over the past three years.

“Training is a significant factor in closing the skills gap, but training alone doesn’t do it,” said Scott Blanchard, vice president for client solutions at The Ken Blanchard Companies. “Closing the skills gap involves closing another gap—between learning and doing.”

While it requires a large time commitment initially, Blanchard emphasizes that managers must become more adept at coaching and mentoring emerging leaders. Specifically, man-

agers need to foster creativity among their staff and seek solutions through collaboration.

“Our research shows that organizations need to spend 10 times the energy to reinforce training as they do in delivering it,” Blanchard said. “For this reason, coaching has become a necessity.”

Concerns about succession planning were on the upswing in 2006. Demographics, notably the pending retirement of baby boom leaders, will create a void at the executive level. Blanchard and other workplace analysts expect a larger proportion of inexperienced individuals will be promoted to leadership positions.

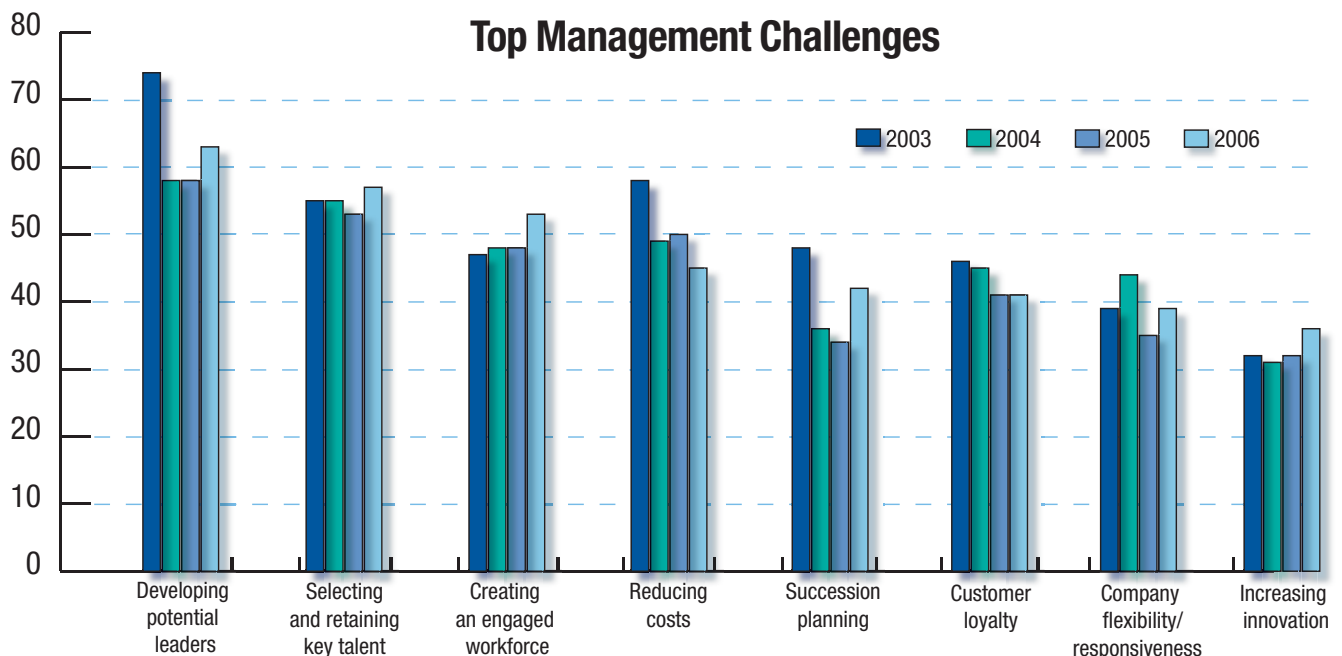
To address the advancing need, an organization must identify the major skills required to maintain a competitive edge. The next step is for the organization to conduct an honest evaluation of whether their current crop of leaders exhibits those same on-the-job competencies. Some of the essential management skills Blanchard identified include: strong communication, ability to work with a team, and setting individual goals that complement the organization’s objectives.

Michael Laff is an associate editor of *T+D*; mlaff@astd.org.

The BIG Number...

43%

Training officials who cited skills shortages as a primary business challenge in 2006.



Source: The Ken Blanchard Companies