

Have you ever wondered what common skill is mastered by great leaders? Is it charisma, hustle, strategic thinking, maybe great sales skills, or technical expertise? What if I told you that the skill that's mastered by great leaders isn't just about having the best strategy or the most charisma, that it isn't just about their output or technical expertise, but the one skill mastered by all great leaders is a skill that's not even about them. It's the skill of developing leaders.

See, across every sector of life, whether you're a CEO, a department head, an administrator, a coach, or a parent, every great leader who leaves a lasting legacy has this one specific skill in common. You see, vision and building teams are two of the most foundational skills, but developing leaders is the most multiplicative skill. Vision sets the course; developing leaders makes it generational.

Think about the state of Division 1 college football. The most prolific head coaches in the game at programs such as Texas, Oregon, Georgia, Indiana, LSU, and Miami all have one thing in common. And no, I'm not talking about their play-calling skills or how they do in recruiting. All of them were developed under the same leader, Nick Saban. See, all of these head coaches didn't get to where they are on their own. They had a leader, a mentor, a coach that developed them and prepared them for future opportunities. And because of the commitment of one leader that chose to develop future leaders, the entire landscape of college football has completely changed.

And I would bet that if you look back at your journey, there would be someone who you would point to that developed you for your current role. Because nobody gets to where they are on their own. Somewhere along the way, somebody helped you, encouraged you, empowered you, believed in you, and gave you an opportunity to lead when you weren't quite ready. And that is leadership development.

Let me ask you this question. If your current role was suddenly vacant, is there someone that you have intentionally prepared to step into that tomorrow? And whatever your answer is to that question, it highlights the value of mastering the skill of developing leaders. You see, if you only lead followers, you're limited by your own hands. But when you develop leaders, you break the ceiling of your own capacity. You see, great leaders are interested more in other's success than their own. And this type of leader believes that their leadership ceiling is the floor for those that they are developing.

So, what is a leader? A leader is someone who takes responsibility. It's someone who creates culture and develops others while accomplishing a specific task. And you are a leader, and that defines who you are. And that is the type of leader that you want to develop. Because you can teach what you know, but you reproduce who you are.

And if that's who a leader is, then what is leadership development? Leadership development is helping someone become who they were created to be. It focuses more on who they are

becoming, not what they are doing. But how do you develop leaders? Well, before creating a process or a strategy, you must start with having a commitment and an intentionality to developing leaders. And it all starts with commitment and intentionality because developing leaders, the process of that, it takes time. It doesn't just happen overnight. Like, you can't just Amazon Prime your next great leader. Like, you must be committed to developing them and be intentional about how you do it. And in order for leadership development to be successful, there must be a shift in perspective of your entire organization. It's a perspective of not settling for who an individual is today, but dreaming about who they can become tomorrow.

Developing leaders is creating a future for them that doesn't exist yet. It is seeing a picture of their preferred future. It's seeing what can be in a person amidst what already is. And you see this culture in some of the most successful organizations. See, think about Toyota with me for a second. Toyota is world-renowned not just for cars but for the Toyota Production System. Like, their philosophy is, "We build people before we build cars." And that may sound a little strange for a philosophy for a global car company, but for over 80 years, they've been able to develop some great people, that in turn developed some great cars.

See, managers at Toyota are not evaluated solely on production quotas. They are measured by their ability to mentor and develop their teams. For Toyota, a leader who isn't developing isn't leading. They don't settle for what is today in their team. They dream of the mastery that can be achieved tomorrow. So, they are committed to and focus on developing leaders who thoroughly understand the work, live that philosophy, and then can teach it to others. Like, yes, Toyota is focused on building great cars, but they understand that if they don't build people before cars, their future is going to be short-lived.

So, as a leader, once you cast a great vision of developing leaders and build a great team, it's now time to develop them into great leaders. But how do you do that? Well, it can be as simple as these three things: identify, empower, and coach. See, developing leaders starts with identifying. Identifying what? Well, potential in people. It's looking past current performance and searching for the raw materials that indicate that someone can grow into a great leader.

But as a leader yourself, like, what do you look for and how do you identify the right people to develop? Well, maybe ask yourself questions like, "Who on my team asks why more than they ask how? Who maintains a measured approach when things don't go quite as planned? Who does everything with their whole heart? Like, who has God-given talents that make everyone around them better? Who do other people naturally gravitate towards and listen to when they speak?" Like, these are just a few questions that you can use to identify who to develop into the next great leader on your team.

And once you identify the potential as a leader, now you get to move into the second thing, which is to empower. See, another way to say this is to give the developing leader ownership of specific task. See, leadership development happens at the edge of the comfort zone, and as

a leader, you have a unique vantage point to strategic stretch assignments for that team member you are developing. So, consider the following. Have the developing team member lead a meeting or a presentation in your place. Maybe give them autonomy to design a solution to a recurring problem or a broken process. Or maybe assign them to a project on a different team to build collaboration skills.

See, some organizations map out their progression and identify specific stretch assignments as a way to identify if that individual is being developed. Raising Cane's, for example, has a structured leadership development process in place to help team members that have that desire to grow, become restaurant partners. See, at Cane's, every restaurant partner starts their leadership development journey as a cashier, then a fry cook, then moves into leading the kitchen and the prep, then into managing a shift, then to leading a restaurant, and through that process, they are developed into a leader called a restaurant partner.

See, the team members go from being individual contributors to front-line managers to restaurant leads. This well-defined process helps the organization know if they are truly developing leaders. The more restaurant partners they develop, the more it proves their process true. You see, a clearly defined process has the power to move people from where they are to where they could be. And at each juncture, have an intentional connection with them to talk through what they're learning or process questions that they have.

See, as a leader, you are their coach, and one of the worst things that could happen for a developing leader is to have an uncoached rep, which leads us to the third thing, which is to coach. And why is this important? Well, how else will your developing leader know if they're going in the right direction? So, leverage quick touch points or your scheduled one-on-ones to coach on things like their communication or their presence in a meeting, on things like their growth in moving from questions like, "What should I do?" to statements like, "Here's what I recommend." Or coach them on their throughput or their quality of work. You see, coaching a developing leader allows them to course correct quickly, increases their engagement and retention, and it reinforces excellence in the things that they're doing right.

So, to recap, to develop leaders, we identify, we empower, and we coach. And these three things can guide you as you begin to develop leaders on your team. Remember, the most significant contribution you can make as a leader is not to today's bottom line, but to the long-term development of your team, and that requires ownership.

But how do you know if you're taking ownership of the development of your future leaders? Maybe think through questions like this. "Are you developing somebody personally?" Because first-class leaders don't come from second-hand commitment. "Are you preparing in advance?" You see, development requires knowing the team member that you're investing in. It's identifying the task or the projects that will take their leadership lessons from their head into their heart. "Are you frequently reinforcing their growth?" Like, find creative ways to explain the

why, leverage the right times to remind them of their development journey. And this can come at the beginning of a new project or after a big win.

Think about questions like, "Are you evaluating the process frequently?" Like, a good way to check the pulse of your process is to ask those that you're developing, "What are we doing? Why are we doing it? And what role do you play in the bigger picture?" You see, developing leaders is not a one-time thing, or a once-a-quarter thing, or a once-a-fiscal-year thing. It's an all-the-time thing. Taking your leadership ceiling to create their leadership floor takes commitment to develop, to identify, to empower, and to coach. And by doing so, you as a leader are taking ownership of the leadership development process.

Great leaders master the skill of developing leaders. And the good news is, you are a great leader with great potential. And I hope that you'll learn many skills, that you'll sharpen most of them, but master the ones that really count. Ideas inform, goals measure, vision moves, and developing leaders keeps it going for generations to come. So come on, dream, create a future that doesn't exist for your team, and develop leaders that develop leaders.