Great Systems Leadership Work System Improvement Tips

By Kevin McManus, Chief Excellence Officer, Great Systems LLC

## Do you have an effective leadership work system?

Effective leadership skills come naturally to some people (they are born with these skills). Many more people with leadership responsibilities are out there than we have people who were born with these skills.

Additionally, few people train to be effective leaders as part of their formal education. If you consider these facts as a set, you may also recognize that your leadership work system needs improvement.

Whether we want to admit it or not, most leaders lead like parents. This is the leadership model we demonstrate the most often, and it is the one that we are most familiar with. Unfortunately, a parental leadership approach will not lead to sustainable, high-performance results.

![Great Systems! logo] "Simple systems, great results!"
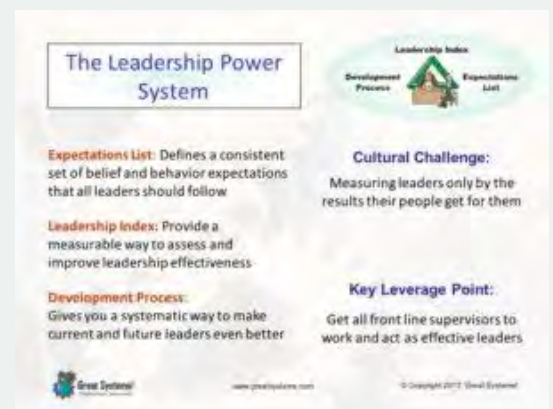
"The first step on the road to high performance begins with a choice."

It is a harsh reality that we are hesitant to admit. We have a high percentage of ineffective leaders in our organizations. Plus, we often pay these people significant amounts of money in many cases to be ineffective., Design flaws in our leadership work systems are to blame.

Do you want to achieve higher levels of leadership effectiveness?

If you want better leadership results, you have to change your leadership work system. Fortunately, a few organizations out there know this. They design their leadership work systems to produce the results they desire.

These work systems help leaders communicate a consistent mission and vision across the organization. These systems help develop the skills of each of their leaders over time. You cannot improve leadership effectiveness by simply sending your leaders to workshops or asking them to change.


Change the design of the in-place leadership work system to give you the desired results. What percentage of your leaders are great leaders? How do you know? Does your leadership work system need improvement?

DISCOVER MORE: Measuring Leadership Behavior Effectiveness

How value added are your leaders?

For years, we have used tools and concepts such as lean thinking and six sigma to take the waste out of our front line systems. However, we neglect to use these tools on perhaps the most important and costly system in our organizations - the leadership work system.

Think about it. How much does your organization pay out in leadership wages and benefits each day? Do you get value from what it costs for EACH of your directors, managers, and supervisors? If your leaders stopped spending time on what they spend time on each day, would your customers notice?

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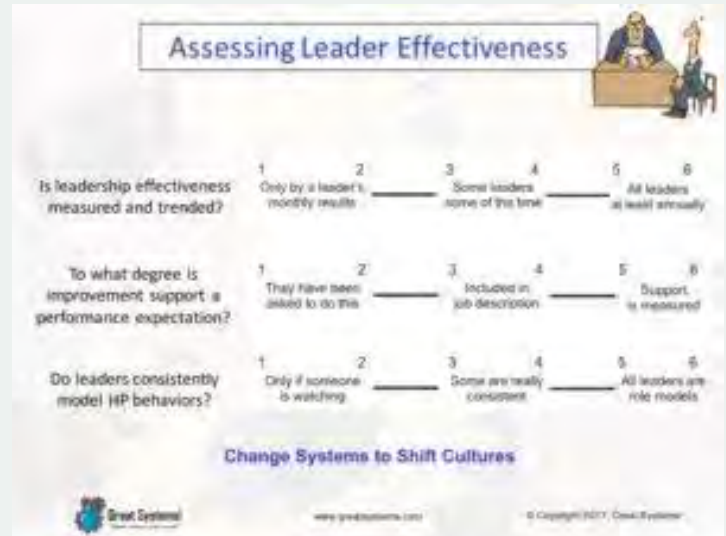
High performance organizations, such as those that pursue the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, make efforts to get high amounts of value from each of their leaders. They measure leadership effectiveness on a regular basis at all levels of the business.

It is an expectation that each leader develops over time. They consistently evaluate the effectiveness of the various types of communication that leaders have with their people, both in meetings and on the job.

Most organizations do not consistently evaluate their leaders, beyond the use of the traditional job description and annual performance appraisal. They may use a 360-degree feedback tool on occasion, but few companies link the use of this tool to their leadership development process (if a formally defined process exists).

Why do we not search for (demand more) measurable leadership performance? Why are we content to assume that the monthly departmental numbers each leader is responsible for give us enough feedback to determine if a leader is doing their job or not?
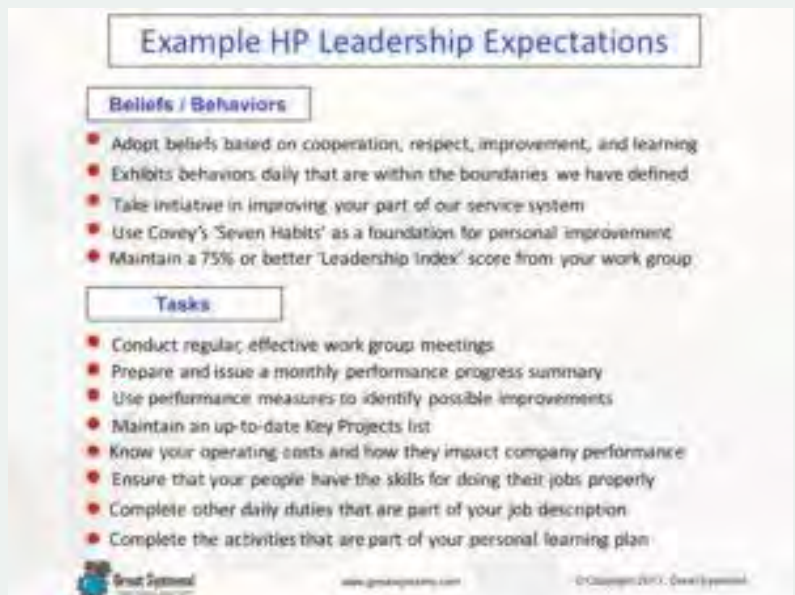
How high are your Leader Standard waste levels?

When your leaders perform on the job each day, do they send a consistent message about performance expectations? Do they behave in a manner that is consistent with the organizational culture you desire? Are they spending their time on those activities that will benefit the company the most?

It is likely your responses reflect inconsistency. All too often, we have too much Leader Standard Waste in our organizations. In other words, the daily work habits of our leaders fail to support the mission, vision, and values of the organization. Their daily behaviors are often inconsistent with the organizational roadmap that exists.

We would like to think that the strategic plan we give out each year provides enough leadership guidance. Our monthly meetings should tell everyone where we want to go, and why. Unfortunately, each leader's daily behavior on the job often overrides the contents of a plan or the message leaders state in a meeting.

Unfortunately, the daily behavior of each leader on the job almost always overrides the contents of a notebook or the message leaders state in a meeting. When inconsistent Leader Standard Work

practices exist, so does the potential for hypocrisy. Such hypocrisy affects personal performance contributions at all levels in the organization.

How do you define, measure, analyze, and improve Leader Standard Work?

Most organizations do not have a formal approach to define, measure, and improve daily Leader Standard Work. This can result in consistent daily levels of Leader Standard Waste. This waste can be of both a behavior and a time nature.

For example, many leaders act one way when their boss is around. Then, they act totally different when they think no one above them is watching. Other simply spend their time on non-value added work.

Either result can have a negative impact on team morale, focus, and performance. A failure to define, measurement, and improve Leader Standard Work can do a lot of damage to an organization in a short amount of time.

What kind of direction do your leaders give to their people each day, both intentional and unintentional? How do you define Leader Standard Work?

How consistently do your leaders lead?

What is the greatest failure of most organizations, outside of neglecting work team leaders in general? It lies in our failure to ensure that our leaders consistently practice effective daily work habits.

Plus, we want to ensure that key skills exist, or are being developed, as time goes by. For example, how many of your leaders continue to improve their computer skills to keep pace with technology shifts?

How do you ensure that each leader maintains a consistent focus on the needs of both your internal and external customers? Also, how do you make sure that each person you pay to be a leader consistently treats each of their people with respect and dignity? Do your leaders work to build stronger personal relationships with those people they depend on to get the job done each day?

EXPLORE MORE: Work Team Leader Coaching Options

Would you benefit from a more effective approach to leadership?

Over the years, I have learned that the work team leader is the key leverage point to make any improvement effort work. These people help execute the organization's plans every day.

Unfortunately, on too many occasions I see how most businesses, schools, and hospitals tend to discount, if not completely ignore, the effectiveness of these people.

For example, they may rarely participate in planning efforts, development activities, or good performance feedback processes. We fail to include those who really make the most difference, good or bad!

How do we solve this problem? How do we make sure that each of our leaders, and especially those that work on the front lines, are acting and performing in a manner that is consistent with what we want to be and where we want to go?

The answers are simple. However, we must let go of some deeply entrenched belief systems. Beliefs drive personal behavior on the job. In turn, they affect plan execution and systems design.

**DISCOVER MORE: Ten Ways To Change Work Culture**

How can we monitor the performance of supervision to help ensure they effectively support the leadership work system?

As with any type of supervision or process ownership, you should use a balanced set of metrics and reports to track leadership behavior and task effectiveness.

For example, you could conduct a 'bottom up' Leadership Index for each work team leader by his direct reports at least once a year as a behavior effectiveness metric.

Also, the work team leader should be held responsible for the safety, cost, quality, and people metrics that his or her processes produce over time (in the form of trend lines and a balanced scorecard).

The impact of work system changes and team development activities should also be evident in the process trends. A key mistake, which is made in most organizations, occurs when we expect an external department, such as Safety, Quality, Engineering, or Human Resources, to manage the process results in these areas across multiple process groups.

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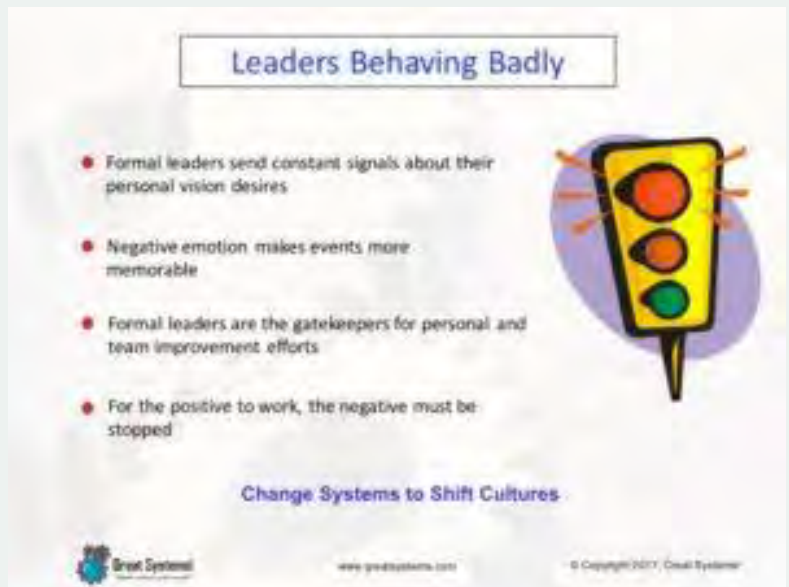
As a plant manager, I expected each of my process owners (and myself) to provide the following each month – a key project list for their processes, a monthly summary of their key accomplishments and challenges, and a performance summary spreadsheet that shows DAILY process inputs and outputs.

Because I expected my supervisors to spend 30-60 minutes a day on these items and use a spreadsheet to compile and organize them, I could review their progress at any time by simply looking at the spreadsheet itself, the results trend lines posted in their process areas, and/or their hard copy monthly report (or intranet web page). My "Process Excellence from the Inside Out" workshop is specifically designed to help you install a similar process for your work team leaders in your organization.
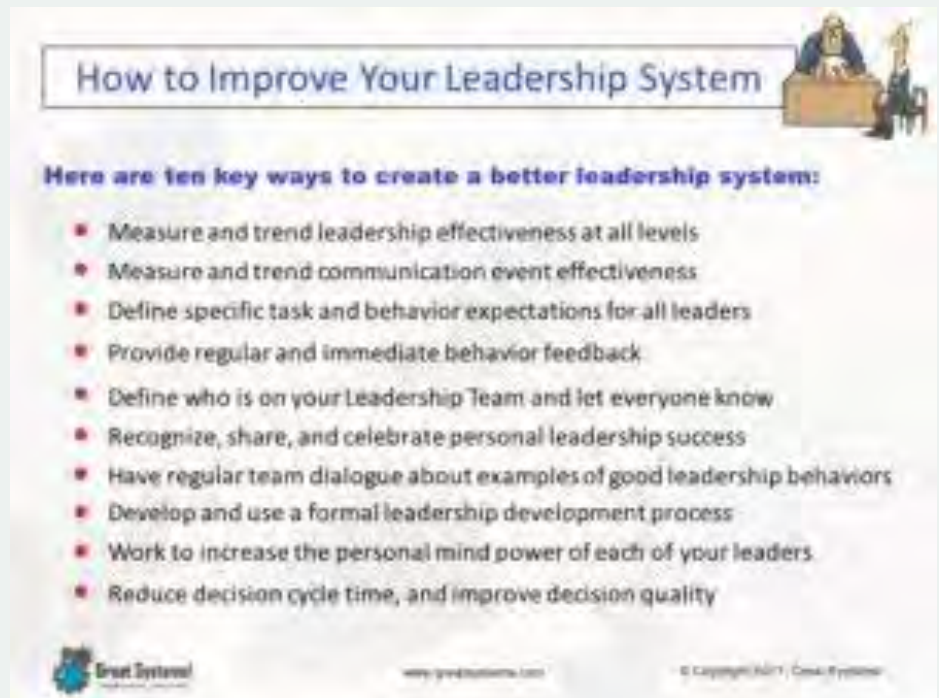
BUY my "Facilitating and Leading Teams" workbook NOW at Amazon.com

How can Great Systems help you improve your leadership work system?

For over 40 years, I have helped design leadership systems in a variety of organization types, both small and large. These experiences help me discover value added, simple ways to set up systems to measure leadership effectiveness.

Plus, we can link the results of this regular measurement to a formal leadership development process.

Finally, we can use a communications blueprint to help make sure that all leadership communications are

both coordinated and value added. Lost leadership is the primary power restrictor for this power system. These tools help you both eliminate that barrier and move forward more rapidly towards higher levels of performance.

DISCOVER MORE: Measuring Leadership Behavior Effectiveness

Do you have leadership work system improvement questions?

If you have interest in the leadership work system designs and improvement tools that I offer, send me an e-mail at **kevin@greatsystems.com.**

Keep improving! - **Kevin McManus,** Chief Excellence Officer and Systems Guy, **Great Systems**

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About the author

As Chief Excellence Officer of Great Systems LLC, Kevin McManus provides virtual coaching and content to help people use proven best practices to enhance and optimize their daily work systems.

Over forty years of work experience in roles such as Industrial Engineer, Training Manager, Production Manager, Plant Manager, and Director of Quality give Kevin a 'real life work' perspective relative to daily work process optimization, work team engagement and empowerment, and sustainable operational excellence.

As a contract trainer for the TapRooT® root cause analysis process, Kevin has taught over 450 courses and further enhanced his ability to help leaders proactively minimize risk, reduce errors, and improve reliability. Kevin holds an undergraduate degree in Industrial Engineering and an MBA. He served as a national Malcolm Baldrige Performance Excellence Award Examiner for twenty years, including a three-year term on the national Judge's Panel.

Kevin has authored the monthly performance improvement column for Industrial and Systems Engineer magazine for over 20 years, is an Institute of Industrial and Systems Engineering Fellow and has been a member of IISE for over forty years. His newest book, "Different Company – How the Best Build Great Organizations", will be published in late 2025."

If you would like more information about the improvement tools and systems I have to offer, please send me an e-mail at kevin@greatsystems.com.

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"The first step on the road to high performance begins with a choice."

Kevin McManus, Great Systems!

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More Great Improvement Books by Kevin McManus!

Pursuing Process Excellence

- 150 pages of ideas and examples that will help you accelerate and sustain your process improvement efforts

- Over 25 examples of 'best practice' assessment tools that leaders can use to encourage and support high performance work

- 12 team exercises that can be used to begin applying each concept as it is learned

Vital Signs Measurement

- 128 pages of ideas and examples to help you make your existing measurement systems more meaningful

- Over 30 examples of 'best practice' measurement tools and techniques that leaders can use to promote high performance work

- 14 team exercises that can be used to begin applying key concepts as they are learned

Error Proof

- 162 pages of strategies and dialogue questions to help you stop daily goofs for good

- Over 100 proven best practices that you can use to help error proof your key work processes

- Can be paired with the 100 page workshop workbook that contains 13 team exercises to help you begin applying key ideas

Facilitating and Leading Teams

- 182 pages of ideas, tools, and examples to help you improve work team, project team, and focus team effectiveness

- 10 assessments that will help you identify areas of strength and weakness relative to work and project team support

- Over 20 team exercises that will help you optimize your use of teams and improve meeting effectiveness, while also practicing your facilitation skills

How to Develop a High Performance Work Culture

- 162 pages of ideas and examples to help you begin changing your existing work systems so that they are less likely to hold back your culture change and performance improvement efforts

- Over 30 examples of tools ad techniques that are used by high performance organizations to help shape their work cultures

- 14 team exercises to help you create work systems that support and encourage a high performance work culture

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