



Helping Leaders Shape the World

New Survey: Leaders Need Help Influencing Up and Driving Change

Among the greatest challenges for leaders is “influencing up” as a “trusted advisor and strategic partner” to more senior levels, according to just-released 2016 survey of 400 leaders from more than 300 companies. Whether they seek to influence their own peers and managers, or board members, clients and industry experts, 24% said this is an urgent and timely challenge, while 64% said it is applicable and very relevant.

Among those surveyed, many said they need to get beyond relying on their business acumen and experience to lead change and get things done. 23% report that rolling up their sleeves with a “get it done mentality” is not enough to be effective in their roles. Another 65% said this is for them a relevant and applicable issue in their development.

The survey, conducted by Bates, a consulting firm specializing in executive presence and communicative leadership, was conducted over a 6 month period, gathering responses to questions about executive presence and influence. The data shows leaders are facing significant challenges in leading through the headwinds of change. They want and need their companies to provide them with support, by offering more leadership development, especially in the area of communication and influence.

“What leaders are recognizing is that there is a trajectory of growth and that it isn’t always a natural progression,” says Suzanne Bates, CEO. “Faced with huge challenges, they need to better appreciate how to rally others to drive change.” The challenges leaders name include expanding into new markets, innovating new products, attracting and engaging a technical workforce, and navigating social, economic and regulatory changes in their industries. Bates says, “Leaders who get promoted up are looking for guidance as to how to influence decisions, and inspire their own teams to get things done.”

In response to the statement “I am leading an initiative that requires groups and functions to work together collaboratively,” – 30% said the statement was urgent and timely, while 62% said it was highly relevant. Additionally, 24% said there is urgent and important change in their groups or businesses, while another 54% said change was among their top business challenges.

“Leading change is more challenging than ever, because of the speed of business today,” says Bates. “Influencing others and driving change is a real, present and urgent issue for leaders across every industry.” Bates, a global consulting firm that specializes in executive communication and leadership influence, has developed the first-and-only science based model of executive presence and influence.

“Three years of research on executive presence and influence finds that a majority of leaders believe they have the necessary business and technical skills,” says Bates. However, in a review of other data, available through analysis of 360 assessments, the firm uncovered perceived gaps in development for leaders in social emotional qualities of leadership.

“Qualities such as concern, resonance, and inclusiveness, all associated with executive presence, tend to be rated lower by peers, direct reports and managers,” says Bates. Their colleagues would like to see them develop more of what is often referred to as E.Q.,” says Bates. “Qualities such as composure,



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restraint, and humility, are highly correlated with leading through change, driving innovation and making companies competitive.”

Among those responding to the survey of 400 leaders, 28% were senior executives, 12% high potential leaders, and the rest were middle managers, supervisors and individual contributors who have an interest in developing themselves as leaders. A small percentage of respondents were also leadership development professionals in a position to observe what types of business challenges leaders in their organizations are confronting.

The firm’s research has led to a science-based definition of executive presence, as the qualities leaders need to engage, align, inspire and move people to act. The model and Bates ExPI assessment are now deployed in at least 17 countries. The survey shows most leaders would invest more time in developing presence and influence if their companies offered it.

69% of leaders in the 2016 survey say their companies are not offering enough meaningful development. The survey included leaders from every level from senior executives to mid-level managers and individual contributors interested in leadership roles. 20% said their organization invests little or nothing in their leadership development. 13% said their organizations offer some leadership development but that they don’t consider it relevant or worthwhile. An additional 36% reported their organizations offer some useful leadership development but that it is not as frequent or comprehensive as they wish it was.

Do leaders have the time, or want to spend the time in developing themselves? The answer is a resounding yes. More than half said they were willing to spend at least five hours a week on their development if it would help their careers; almost everyone else said they would be willing to spend at least five hours a month.

Suzanne Bates, author of four books including the new, “All the Leader You Can Be, The Science of Achieving Extraordinary Executive Presence,” says that presence is no longer a mysterious X-factor in leadership. The firm released the first validated, science-based model of executive presence and influence in 2014, which highlights 15 specific qualities of executive presence essential to leadership effectiveness. These include qualities of “character” such as integrity and humility; qualities of “substance” including practical wisdom and vision; and qualities of “style” such as intentionality and inclusiveness, all play a significant role in the leader’s ability to get people to go above and beyond.

For more information on the survey, or the research on executive presence, please contact mmcgrath@bates-communications.com