



# Excel Leader Advisory Letter

ISSUED BY THE EXCEL LEADERSHIP GROUP

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## Excel's Mission Statement:

We help leaders create and sustain a high performance, values-based culture that fully engages the talents of all associates to consistently deliver world-class results and achieve higher profits.

## Thought for January

"It's important if you're successful that you set an example for the people who work for you in the way you conduct your life. You know, jumping on a train rather than jumping in a limousine or going second class rather than first class. Little things are quite important."

-Richard Branson



In the September issue, we talked about the critical connection between effective leadership, an organization's work culture and profitability. The main lesson for all executives is that effective leaders create high performance cultures which foster higher levels of employee engagement and discretionary effort that in turn produce better results and higher profits. Therefore, prudent executives would do well to place significant emphasis and resources on the recruitment and development of their leadership talent in order to improve profitability and secure a real, sustainable competitive advantage in today's global economy. In the October issue, we began a review of the critical characteristics that differentiate some leaders as extraordinary. Thus far, we have discussed three of these characteristics: high integrity, visioning and communication.

This month let's discuss a fourth characteristic that sets extraordinary leaders apart from their peers: change agent or catalyst. As John P. Kotter, professor at The Harvard Business School and a foremost expert in the field of business leadership says in his book [Leading Change](#): "The rate of change is not going to slow down anytime soon. If anything, competition in most industries will probably speed up even more in the next few decades." I certainly agree with his observation. If that is indeed the case, then a key question for 21st century leaders is: If change is inevitable and the pace is only going to quicken, what can we do to successfully manage the changes needed to foster growth and profitability for our companies? A complimentary question is: How do we avoid the pitfalls that often lead to disaster when change is not managed successfully?

One proven approach is to utilize some of the competencies we have already talked about. Namely, having a clear and compelling vision of the future and then communicating that vision effectively and consistently throughout the organization. Change often involves short-term sacrifice on the part of an organization's staff. As John Kotter points out in his book, the only way to get employees on board and commit their best efforts to support the change is to capture their hearts and minds through constant and effective communication of the vision as a very attractive place that people will aspire to reach. As well, the vision must be articulated with a high degree of credibility and authenticity. In other words, people have to both believe it is possible to achieve and that they play a critical part in its success. Remember that if the leader does not thoroughly believe in the direction of change and passionately communicate that to the team, buy-in is not possible and failure is the probable outcome. This leads us back to the high integrity element that we discussed in October. You can begin to appreciate how these critical characteristics of highly effective or extraordinary leaders tie together.

One other key point to keep in mind to avoid many of the pitfalls and successfully manage change is to create a sense of urgency. Again, John Kotter talks about this as the first of his eight steps to successful organizational transformation. Leaders must create a mentality among their teams that "the

building is on fire". Although this may seem extreme on the surface, it helps avoid the inevitable complacency that can permeate the organizational culture as people say "this idea or proposed change too shall pass". Leaders must convince their teams that the change is not only necessary but must be executed now or else unacceptable consequences will occur such as loss of market share for example. Further, leaders must challenge their teams to commit their best efforts to create a positive outcome.

Thus far, we have discussed four critical characteristics of "extraordinary" leaders: high integrity, visioning, communications and change agent or catalyst. Next month, we will continue by discussing a fourth dimension or characteristic: resilience.

As always, I encourage readers to contact me anytime at [mike@excelleadership.net](mailto:mike@excelleadership.net) with your comments and questions. Also, if Excel can be of assistance to you with any of your leadership challenges, please give us a call. We wish you and yours a happy, safe and prosperous 2009. Be well. We'll talk to you again in February. Best regards.

Join our Web-based "community" devoted to open and honest discussions on topics related to leadership challenges and solutions. To join, simply visit [TheExcelLeadershipGroup.net](http://TheExcelLeadershipGroup.net) and click on "Community."



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