



Four Moves All High-Performance Organizations Make

Leading has never been easy.

From our first experiment trying to get our classmates to follow us or receiving our first official assignment at work, leadership has always demanded our best effort. That hasn't changed—but something else has: the complexity of the problems we face and the organizations we lead has increased exponentially.

Perhaps this complexity finds its energy in the scope of your enterprise, or it may merely be a function of increased volume. These are great problems to have ... if leaders can orchestrate an appropriate response.

Unfortunately, for many leaders, our past successes just don't translate. The game has literally changed before our eyes. The methods that worked extremely well in the past no longer have the same effect. In many cases, the tried and true has become the tired and tarnished.

Most of us began our leadership journey utilizing an approach with striking similarities to the game of checkers, a fun, highly reactionary game often played at a frantic pace. Any strategies we employed in this style of leadership were limited, if not rudimentary. The opportunities in our world for leaders to play checkers and be successful are dwindling.

The game today for most leaders can better be compared to chess—a game in which strategy matters; a game in which individual pieces have unique abilities that drive unique contributions; a game in which heightened focus and a deeper level of thinking are required to win.

Although chess not checkers provides a rich metaphor for leaders, it is much more than that. The game of chess contains four specific parallels that can inform and transform any organization seeking new levels of performance. I've positioned each of these ideas as a “move” your organization can make to draw closer to your goals.

These moves are not the creation of an overactive imagination; they are the product of an extensive study of some of the world's leading organizations – from the Navy SEALs, to a world-championship sailing team, to chicken restaurants, and more! Collectively, these moves can be your blueprint for sustained high performance.

01 Bet on Leadership

All High Performance Organizations (HPO) take leadership seriously. Not only are these enterprises well-led today, there is continuing investment in the development of future leaders. Everything really does rise and fall on leadership. Without leadership capacity, you cannot consistently execute the remaining moves.

Is your organization a place where leaders are routinely and systematically developed and you have a surplus? If not, you've not yet created a leadership culture.

Here are a few ideas for you to consider:

- Be sure you model the way. If you value life-long learning, your actions must support your beliefs. Intention unexpressed is of little effect. Behavior inconsistent with your stated values destroys leadership credibility. Walk the talk and your people will follow.
- Require Development Plans from every leader. The format does not matter. What does matter – every leader needs to have a written development plan. Some organizations require these plans to be approved by a person's supervisor. Focus on critical gaps before you attempt to leverage strengths.

02 Act as One

Alignment is one of the most powerful levers leaders can pull to improve the performance of their organizations. HPOs are passionate about alignment. How many people in your organization know your dreams and aspirations? How about your core values? Your goals, strategies, and plans? In the best organizations, the answer is everyone!

Is everyone in your organization pursuing a shared aspiration for your culture? If not, you have yet to harness the ultimate competitive advantage.

Try this:

- **Test for alignment.** Ask ten of your employees what they believe your organization is trying to become or achieve. If they give you the same answer, congratulations! If not, alignment is still an opportunity for you.
- **Establish clear organizational priorities.** Some call these strategic priorities or strategic bets; others might use the term “must wins.” Still others would use the term Key Organizational Objectives. Regardless of what you call them, you need them. What are the big overarching priorities of your organization? Declare this at the beginning of your planning process, and build your plans to make them a reality.

03 Win the Heart

How much do your employees care about your organization, their co-workers, and their work? The answer to this question is also the answer to the question: How engaged is your workforce? Without engagement, alignment is irrelevant. In HPOs, leaders always work to win the heart of their team members. When they do, the team is well positioned for the fourth and final move.

Do all of your employees care deeply about their work, their co-workers and the organization? If not, you have untapped potential in your people and your performance.

Consider the following best practices.:

- **Expect people to think.** What is your organizational bias on this issue? Do you treat people like “hired hands?” If you do, all you will ever have are their hands. What a tragedy. Many organizations operate as if there is a sign over the door that says, “Please check your brain when you enter, it will be returned to you when you leave the building.” High Performance Organizations know that you get a free brain with every pair of hands you hire. People in these organizations are expected to think.
- **Help People Pursue Their Dreams.** The place to start is to begin the conversation. Many people have not thought deeply about their dreams; others have but have never shared their thoughts with anyone at work. The conversations may seem weird and awkward at first but are a perfect time for leaders to explain their motivation: you want your employees to be successful outside of work, as well as at work.

04 Excel at Execution

Greatness hinges on execution. If your organization doesn't consistently deliver what you promise, you are doomed to mediocrity or worse, irrelevance in the mind of your customers. HPOs deliver not because they want to but because the people within the organization are well lead, aligned, and engaged. These first three moves perfectly position your team to execute and win!

Does your organization consistently produce elite levels of work and do you routinely sustain this level of excellence? If not, you may be playing checkers when the game is chess. Today can be the day you start learning a new game.

- **Share the numbers.** Numbers tell a story – a story of what people did or failed to do. As Edwards Deming said, “In God we trust; everyone else bring data.” Share as much data as you possibly can. Talk about what happened to generate last month's numbers and what can be done proactively to impact next month's data. Ask team members what they would do differently to alter the trends. If you have access to competitor data and industry trends, share these numbers as well. As you raise the business acumen of your employees, you will raise the performance of the organization.
- **Set clear expectations.** Is performance management, including performance feedback, optional in your organization? It probably is today based on your score on this question. Should it be optional? If you think it is okay for employees to work without regular feedback from their leader, don't worry about improving the score on this question.

However, if you believe people deserve feedback on their performance, set the expectation for your leaders to provide it. Do you expect a quarterly conversation with employees? Twice a year? Annually? You must decide.



It's your move!

For assistance building your own High Performance Organization, contact us at Info@LeadEveryDay.com. We can provide, consulting, training, coaching, and other resources.