



THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF LEADING FROM THE MIDDLE

John Maxwell's "Law of the Lid" states an organization cannot outperform the leadership ability of its managers. A key leadership skill of every successful C-Leader is their ability to recruit and empower all-star mid to senior level managers who can create the massive innovations and advances that dramatically strengthen their brand and improve profitability.

Consider this response from a financial services CEO when I asked how CEOs can accelerate their results: "Focus your efforts on getting the right people in the right seats and develop them. Manage the organization with a high-level metric dashboard and give your team (the right people) flexibility and accountability for the dashboard results."

Bank leaders of his caliber understand the importance of building leadership in the middle of the organization, and this article provides an example of leading from the middle, the characteristics of middle-focused all-stars, and advice on leading these high performers.

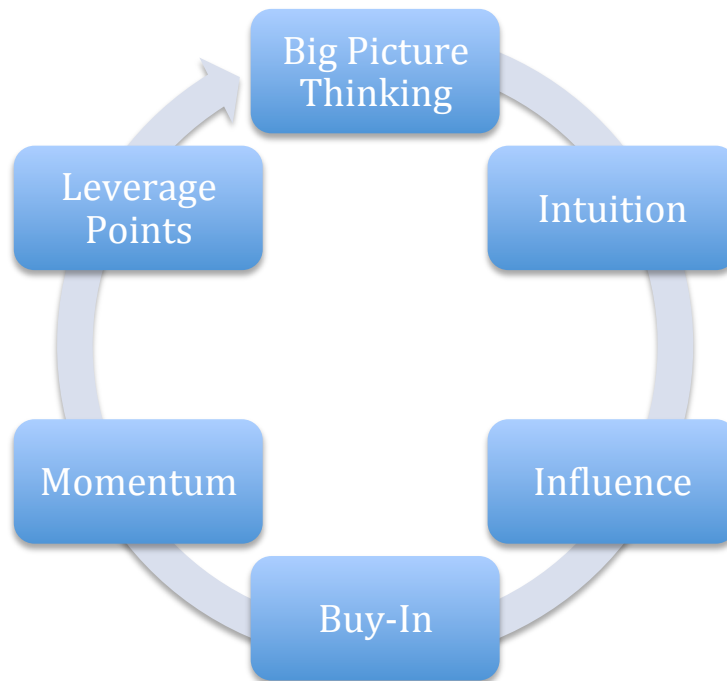
Example

While managing marketing analytics at Arvest Bank my team and I created a project that helped our branch sales force strengthen customer relationships, improve profitability, and increase employee productivity. Leading from the middle is what allowed my four-person team to make this project a huge success across 16 banks and 250 branches.

What made it successful? My team's expertise with analytics and technology was certainly a factor, but we were just four people, and our success required the engagement and cooperation of thousands of employees who didn't report to us. Here are the six success factors that gave us stellar results:

1. **Big Picture Thinking:** Diminishing customer branch visits reduced employee productivity and risked customer relationships.
2. **Intuition:** We had a "feeling" customers would welcome customer service calls.
3. **Influence:** Contact with key internal influencers who supported our efforts.
4. **Buy-In:** Bank senior management teams bought-in to the project with the help of the key internal influencers.
5. **Momentum:** We promoted early successes and established best practices.
6. **Leverage Points:** We focused exclusively on people, ideas, technologies, and processes that could produce explosive growth.

Leading From the Middle: Six Success Factors



Six Characteristics of Middle-Focused All-Stars

To achieve results like those in the example above, middle-focused all-stars share these personal characteristics in addition to mastering their functional areas:

- Fully understand the enterprise, its business and support units, and the industry.
- Practical visionaries who think creatively, independently, strategically, and tactically.
- Bold, courageous, thick skinned, and don't easily give up.
- Build consensus among all levels of management, including executive, support, and front line areas.
- People developers who understand nothing gets accomplished without great teams.
- Impatient, sometimes impulsive. Little regard for unnecessary rules, procedures, bureaucracy.

Leading Your Middle-Focused All-Stars

Congratulations if you have managed to recruit and develop middle-focused all-stars. The challenge for C-Level leaders is keeping these all-stars happy and performing at high levels.

While their talent brings extraordinary results, their aggressive search for the “next big thing” can frustrate and bore them if they perceive too many insurmountable obstacles exist, or if they sense executive management becoming disengaged, overly conservative, or not moving fast enough.

Here are some helpful tips for leading these folks:

- Regularly demonstrate you believe in what they're doing;
- Provide executive sponsorship and remove obstacles;
- Challenge them with new ideas and problems;
- Communicate with them about key issues regularly;
- Be open to new ideas;
- Approve a budget that will let them excel;
- Create personal development plans for them that include leadership development.

C-Level Challenge

Your company needs middle-focused all-stars in order to excel. Here are action steps you can take now to make leading from the middle a winning component of your bank's management team:

- Identify your all-stars;
- Review the Six Success Factors with them;
- Help them create goals aligned with your strategy;
- Discover what obstacles they need removed;
- Create development plans commensurate with their interests and goals.

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