

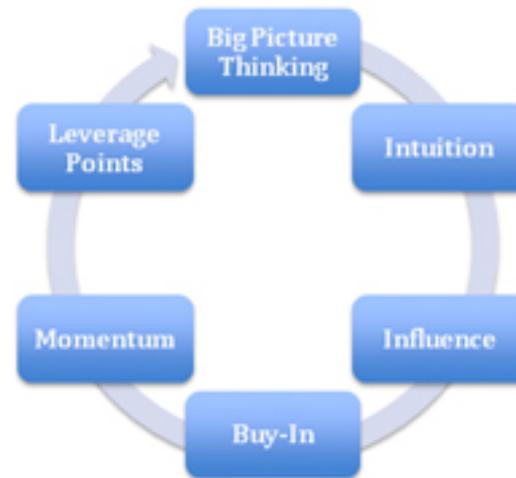
Leadership Matters: The Power of the Middle

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by Scott McClymonds

How to identify and push the performance of mid-level leaders—and why it's worth the effort

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



Consider how CUES member Paul Trylko responded when I asked how CEOs can accelerate their results.

"Focus your efforts on getting the right people in the right seats and develop them," said Trylko, president/CEO of \$740 million **Amplify Credit Union**, Austin, Texas. "Manage the organization with a high-level dashboard and give your team (the right people) flexibility, and accountability, for the dashboard results."

Trylko and leaders of his caliber understand the importance of **building leadership in the middle of the organization**. Teams 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 of the Power of the Middle

As the manager of 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.

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 in our efforts to lead from the middle:

1. **Big-picture thinking:** We were working on the bank-wide issue that we all faced: Diminishing customer branch visits was reducing employee productivity and risking customer relationships.
2. **Intuition:** We had a "feeling" customers would welcome customer service calls.
3. **Influence:** Contact with key internal influencers helped them support 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.

Six Characteristics of Middle-Level 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:

1. fully understand the enterprise, its business and support units, and the industry;
2. think creatively, independently, strategically, and tactically;
3. are bold, courageous, thick skinned, and don't easily give up;
4. build consensus among all levels of management, including executive, support, and front-line areas;
5. develop people because they understand that nothing gets accomplished without great teams; and
6. are impatient and sometimes impulsive. They typically have little regard for unnecessary rules, procedures and bureaucracy.

Leading Your Middle-Focused All-Stars

Congratulations if you have recruited and are working to develop middle-level all-

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stars. The challenge for C-level leaders is keeping these all-stars happy and performing at peak.

While the talent of all-stars brings extraordinary results, they can get frustrated or bored if their relentless search for the “next big thing” meets too many insurmountable obstacles, 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 that include leadership development.

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C-Level Challenge

Your credit union needs middle-focused all-stars to excel. Here are steps you can take to make leading from the middle a winning component of your 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.

Scott McClymonds of ***CEO Velocity*** consulting has helped dozens of financial institutions improve profits and efficiency, grow key business units, and transform sales performance. He is an industry leader at using member and market intelligence to help clients acquire and retain high value members. Readers of this column can receive a free one-hour consultation and assessment by contacting Scott at [**scottm@ceovelocity.com**](mailto:scottm@ceovelocity.com), 479.263.0774, or [**linkedin.com/in/scottmcclymonds**](https://www.linkedin.com/in/scottmcclymonds).