

# Goodbye bosses, long live the leaders

## The golden age of leadership development gives rise to a new breed of company captain

**T**he necessity of quality leadership in South Africa—whether in the public or private sector, in listed companies or start-ups—as never been more pronounced than now. Yet the one aspect that is bemoaned time and again, is the reality that there is scarce supply of true leadership talent.

But this dearth of captains who can steer the ship in calm waters and equally navigate the treacherous oceans of our volatile economy is not only a local problem. As can be seen from the rise in the leadership development industry globally, companies throughout the world wrestle with the ongoing challenge of ensuring they have the right people driving their businesses forward.

### And their concern is not misplaced.

Various research studies and surveys have consistently confirmed the importance of having leaders who can motivate, inspire and effect positive change. Recent research from one of the top global business institutions, London Business School, indicates that organisational performance is directly impacted by the mindset of the leader. And findings from Jack Hammer's latest annual Executive Report, conducted among a large representative sample of senior executives across a range of industries, confirmed that the vast majority of them would consider changing jobs to get away from a bad leader. Considering the sometimes desperate measures required to retain top talent, this should throw up a flashing crimson light.

More than 97% of respondents in the Jack Hammer research said it was of the utmost importance for them to respect and work well

with their direct superiors in an organisation, and that leadership concerns would definitely contribute to a decision to look at career options elsewhere.

Leadership as a determinant of the success of a company has never been more pronounced than it is today, and it is crystal clear throughout both the public and the private sectors that bad leadership is a recipe for bad business and dismal performance.

91% of respondents said organisational culture such as work cohesion, teamwork, trust and collaboration—or rather the lack thereof—would be cause enough to consider alternative job opportunities. Great leaders earn great reputations and attract great people. This ultimately translates into the bottom line, which is why there is a clear commercial imperative for great leadership. A leader who is not able to galvanise a team will soon see productivity, motivation, retention and business suffer.

It is all good and well to know what your company needs. But in an environment where great leaders are few and far between, and come at a premium, how do you ensure that your company does not perish under the guidance of a drunken sailor who is the captain in name only?

### Can great leaders be made?

The number of leadership development programmes on offer globally is almost as big as the actual pool of leaders, and one can be forgiven for harbouring a certain amount of scepticism about the effectiveness of these programmes. Although they have responded to (and are profiting from) the obvious need in the market, still the questions linger: Can great leaders really be made, or is leadership a serendipitous accident of DNA and circumstance? Will investing in such

leadership development not merely amount to a costly exercise with little to no result in the long run? Will enrolling your prospective leaders in such a programme actually turn them into competent—and hopefully excellent—leaders?

### The changing leadership paradigm

The answer to these questions can be found in the common denominator of most of these programmes: almost without exception, they develop the skills and provide the tools which enable individuals with the underlying potential to be transformed into people who can harness the collective talent and skills of an organisation and create a snowball effect.

But these programmes also indicate a marked shift in who is considered a leader. Gone are the days of the autocratic bosses, who commanded from their ivory towers and struck fear into the hearts of the minions.

### Leadership development trends

Results from the latest Deloitte Human Capital report and the Leadership Development Survey conducted by Knowledge Resources in collaboration with Sunny Stout-Rostron and Natalie Cunningham, all point to the following: That there is very clearly a recognition that great leadership skill is a top priority for organisations globally, and in SA. But according to the Deloitte report, the readiness of organisations to deal with leadership needs is low across the board.

It notes that South African respondents recognised the following top five trends in terms of the importance index: Leadership (77%), Retention and Engagement (71%), Diversity and Inclusion (70%), Workforce Capability (70%), Talent Acquisition and Access (69%). Despite these being the most urgent trends, many of