

In Praise of the Incomplete Leader

ENGAGE IN SENSEMAKING

1. Get data from multiple sources: customers, suppliers, employees, competitors, other departments and investors.
2. Involve others in your sensemaking. Say what you think you are seeing, and check with people who have different perspectives from yours.
3. Use early observations to shape small experiments in order to test your conclusions. Look for new ways to articulate alternatives and better ways to understand options.
4. Do not simply apply existing frameworks but instead be open to new possibilities. Try not to describe the world in stereotypical ways, such as good guys and bad guys, victims and oppressors, or marketers and engineers.

SIGNS OF WEAK SENSEMAKING

1. You feel strongly that you are usually right and others are often wrong.
2. You feel your views describe reality correctly, but others' views do not.
3. You find you are often blindsided by changes in your organization or industry.
4. When things change, you typically feel resentful. (That's not the way it should be!)

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

1. Spend time trying to understand others' perspectives, listening with an open mind and without judgment.
2. Encourage others to voice their opinions. What do they care about? How do they interpret what's going on? Why?
3. Before expressing your ideas, try to anticipate how others will react to them and how you might best explain them.
4. When expressing your ideas, don't just give a bottom line; explain your reasoning process.
5. Assess the strengths of your current connections: How well do you relate to others when receiving advice? When giving advice? When thinking through difficult problems? When asking for help?

SIGNS OF WEAK RELATING

1. You blame others for failed projects.
2. You feel others are constantly letting you down or failing to live up to your expectations.
3. You find that many of your interactions at work are unpleasant, frustrating, or argumentative.
4. You find many of the people you work with untrustworthy.

CREATE A VISION

1. Practice creating a vision in many arenas, including your work life, your home life, and in community groups. Ask yourself, “What do I want to create?”
2. Develop a vision about something that inspires you. Your enthusiasm will motivate you and others. Listen to what they find exciting and important.
3. Expect that not all people will share your passion. Be prepared to explain why people should care about your vision and what can be achieved through it. If people don’t get it, don’t just turn up the volume. Try to construct a shared vision.
4. Don’t worry if you don’t know how to accomplish the vision. If it is compelling and credible, other people will discover all sorts of ways to make it real – ways you never could have imagined on your own.
5. Use images, metaphors, and stories to convey complex situations that will enable others to act.

SIGNS OF WEAK VISIONING

1. You feel your work involves managing an endless series of crises.
2. You feel like you’re bouncing from pillar to post with no sense of larger purpose.
3. You often wonder, “Why are we doing this?” or “Does it really matter?”
4. You can’t remember the last time you talked to your family or friend with excitement about your work.

CULTIVATE INVENTIVENESS

1. Don’t assume that the way things have always been done is the best way to do them.
2. When a new task or change effort emerges, encourage creative ways of getting it done.
3. Experiment with different ways of organizing work. Find alternative methods for grouping and linking people.
4. When working to understand your current environment, ask yourself, “What other options are possible?”

SIGNS OF WEAK INVENTING

1. Your organization’s vision seems abstract to you.
2. You have difficulty relating your company’s vision to what you are doing today.
3. You notice dysfunctional gaps between your organization’s aspirations and the way work is organized.
4. You find that things tend to revert to business as usual.