Gallop says that it’s impossible for 70 percent of leaders to make the shift to becoming good leaders.

I disagree, as I’ll outline in this article.

After studying 2.5 million manager-led teams (wow, that is a lot) Gallop, one of the leading research institutions, has concluded that one in ten managers have a natural gift for leadership, and only two in ten have the potential for developing the same skills. They concluded that 7 out of 10 managers do not have what it takes to succeed. (State of the American Manager, 2015)

They do have a suggestion on how to fix the problem: organizations must change the way they hire leaders. Basically they suggest that organizations replace all but the few “naturally gifted” managers.

This puts organizations and leaders in a tough spot. What do you choose?

Replace most of your leaders

or

Live with what you’ve got
So – does this mean that Leadership Training does not work? Disclosure time – I’ve been doing leadership training for over 20 years – this is definitely an: “uh oh” moment for me.

**Leadership training should be easy.** Ask anyone the characteristics of a leader that others will willingly follow, and they will easily supply you with a list of these qualities:

  *Empathy – Experience – Clarity – Communication*
  *Confidence – Competence – Courage*

A brief look at Amazon will show you that the habits and best practices of top leaders are all well documented. Organizations spend vast sums of money on leadership development. Universities are churning out more and more graduates with top credentials, and yet the number one challenge plaguing most organizations is leadership.

Most Leadership training is focused on understanding exactly what the success characteristics are of the ten percent and telling the other ninety percent that if they could only just emulate them they would succeed too. This strategy is not working.

For the past twenty years organizations have measured how satisfied people are with their leaders and nothing has changed. Most surveys show that roughly only one third of direct reports are happy with their leaders.

The core premise of this article is that the talent that makes someone a great salesperson, accountant or engineer is not the same talent that makes him or her a great manager or leader.
We take someone who is successful in one area and then put them into a completely different role where the characteristics that led to success now lead to exhaustion, micromanagement and stress for them and for their teams. In almost every case, a promotion or hiring in a management position happens because of success in a previous non-managerial role or because of experience and tenure in the company or area of expertise.

Leaders motivate every individual on their team, positively influence others’ performance, build relationships, overcome adversity, take a big picture perspective, make decisions that align with organizational goals and create collaborations with peers and influence those they report to. Leaders focus on team or organizational performance.

We recognize, reward and reinforce high individual performance and then turn around and say that if these same people are struggling with leadership it’s because they are not naturally gifted.

Maybe there’s something wrong with this picture!

There is a way to improve leadership. Over the past 15 years we have worked with hundreds of leaders and seen them transition to leadership positions.

Our secret? We focus on mindsets instead of skills, most of the high performers we work with make a successful transition to leadership. The rest typically shift to a different role where they can provide content leadership rather than people leadership.
The Road to Leadership Success has 3 parts:

1. **Encourage** high performers who already have the leadership perspective. Reward and recognize those who have the skills to positively influence others, build relationships, and take a big picture perspective. Ensure that these skills *as well as personal performance* are recognized and rewarded.

2. **Support** your top performers make the shift to a leadership mindsets, particularly those already in leadership positions now. This change in mindset is probably the most difficult thing they will ever do. It will take education, practice, support, regular feedback and coaching.

3. **Identify** those top performers who can’t make the shift and leverage their individual expertise in other ways. A top performer is always better than a bad manager.

In this article I’ll give you some insight into what it takes to help Top Performers successfully make the shift.

**Organizations need great leaders and have already invested in top talent.** Sadly, over fifty percent of new leaders get so discouraged that they start looking for new work within six months of taking a leadership role (though they often don’t leave for two years so their resume is not impacted – they quit and stay).
Younger professionals (millennials and their peers) are actively avoiding taking on leadership roles – they feel that staying a high performer is a better choice; the extra money is just not worth the stress.

As a leader you can significantly decrease your own stress and workload when you let go of mindsets that worked for you in the past but are not working for you today. Shifting mindsets is hard, and trying to do it on your own is nearly impossible. But it’s possible to get unstuck and take those first steps that are the most difficult of all.

This article outlines four key Mindset Shits that must occur if leaders are to be effective:

1. A top performer must focus on personal productivity and achievement.
   
   **A leader must align and focus a team’s productivity.**

2. A top performer is an expert at problem solving.
   
   **A leader removes roadblocks that prevent others from solving problems.**

3. A top performer focuses on immediate personal goals.
   
   **A leader focuses on long-term organizational goals.**

4. A top performer avoids mistakes.
   
   **A leader helps their team “fail their way to success.”**

These leader mindsets need to replace personal performance with team or organizational performance.
Mindset Shift #1 – Shift from personal productivity to team productivity

• A top performer must focus on personal productivity and achievement.

• A leader must align and focus a team’s productivity and achievement.

Organizations select their leaders from people who are very good at what they do – and then tell them to do something different.

Mindset Shift Case Study #1

Sarah was baffled. She had been a public sector leader for about a year and had been very successful with her first team. She had been promoted to a more senior position where those reporting to her were themselves top performers. This team was trouble; they were arguing with her, not following directions, not meeting deadlines, going over her head and making her life miserable.

This happens to a lot of leaders – they find success with a project team or a front-line team but eventually bump into a “problem” team. They try to fix the team by adding structure, communicating more and even replacing “problem” staff, but it rarely works out, and ultimately the leaders themselves will look for a different role or a different organization. This is the point that Sarah was at – if we could not fix the team, she was planning on moving to the private sector.
Sarah had made the common mistake of trying to out expert the experts. In the past she had always been the one with the most expertise. She led teams by setting the example and ensuring they followed her lead. This never works when the team themselves know more than the leader – and these days no matter what your area of expertise – there will be team members who know more than you do in their field; that’s what makes a good team.

We helped Sarah see the team from their perspective. While she saw her attempts at direction as helpful, they experienced them as micromanagement and a lack of confidence. Their challenges were attempts to get Sarah to appreciate what they had to offer and to see if she valued their input. She wanted to be a leader who engaged others, but instead she had become a “boss” who demanded compliance.

Sarah let go of the need to be seen as the expert in every task her team performed. Instead of thinking about “How would I do this,” she asked the question “how can I positively influence the outcome?” Sometimes this meant checking in to ensure a task was on target, other times it meant finding resources for a team member, or it might mean outsourcing training for an area she knew nothing about. Most importantly, she learned how to solicit the feedback of her team to ensure that she was having the impact she wanted. Sarah stopped trying to control everything her team did and instead became the leader the needed her to be.

Sarah’s team did turnaround and Sarah began to appreciate the talent she had. She realized that this team of experts would never be easy to lead but once she understood where they were
coming from it became easier to respond to their challenges. She did not always agree and often had to help them see how her direction was linked to organizational priorities rather than personal preference.

**One year later I checked in with her organization** and discovered that she was no longer with that team, but she hadn’t gone to the private sector – she had been promoted to a very senior position.

**Mindset Shift #2 – Shift from pride in problem-solving to pride in mentoring.**

- A top performer is an expert at problem solving.

- **A leader removes roadblocks that prevent others from solving problems.**

**Most leaders are good at solving problems.** There is a BIG problem with that (excuse the pun), because when we start solving problems for our teams they never learn to solve problems for themselves. On the other hand, if we just leave them to do it on their own – you guessed it – we rob them of the chance to learn.

**A problem solving mindset says when things go wrong it is because something is broken and it is up to me to fix it.** I see myself as the “hammer” and the issue as the “nail” and I do what it takes to fix it. Sound Familiar? What’s missing from this picture? The person who was supposed to work on the issue just
got cut out of the loop. Not only do they feel discouraged, but they are even less motivated to try next time.

**Mindset Shift Case Study #2**

Shane had taken a 3-month stress leave and we were called in to see if the team could be rescued. Shane told us that he was just too soft, he didn’t like being bossy and it was creating a situation where nothing was getting done. His team was taking advantage of his good nature and he was spending so much time fixing their work that he was exhausted.

When we sat down one-on-one with the team members, every single one reported that the leader was too controlling and would not allow them to show initiative. Shane thought he was too permissive and the team thought he was too rigid.

Shane wanted to engage his team but the “expert” mindset kept getting in the way. He would assign tasks and stay hands-off until the end when he swooped in to “fix” the final product. Pretty soon his team got discouraged. What was the point in putting in the effort when you knew that the boss was just going to do it over again?

Shane needed to learn to “get off the stage and onto the balcony.” He was so focussed on doing things his way (the “right” way) that he lost perspective. There is a reason the stage manager is not sitting on the stage!

Instead of handing out projects and then swooping in at the end, Shane started sitting down with each team member to clarify goals and expectations, assess results, identify improvements and
celebrate success. Instead of waiting until the deadline, he added in insights all through the process, kept the team accountable for commitments, removed obstacles as they arose and paid more attention to encouraging what was working than obsessing over what was not.

**Sure, it was a bit rocky for a few months as the team learned to trust each other and their leader again.** But steadily everyone made improvements. Within three months the team went from being the poorest performing team in that organization to the second best. Morale was up, engagement was up, two grievances were dropped and team meetings became a lot more productive.

Mindest Shift #3 – Shift from focus on immediate goals to focus on organizational goals.

- A top performer focuses on immediate personal goals.
- **A leader focuses on long-term organizational goals.**

The higher you move up within an organization the bigger your perspective. Front line staff focus on today, Supervisors focus on the next few months, Managers on the next year, Senior Leaders on the next few years, with the CEO looking ten years ahead. Twenty years ago these timeframes were fairly easy to stick to, but as the world got more global and project life cycles got shorter, everyone’s timeframe seems to be shrinking. Rapid
communication keeps us reacting to immediate problems and changing priorities make it difficult to plan far ahead.

This has left leaders reacting to their teams instead of leading them.

**Mindset Shift Case Study #3**

Bob felt his team needed training in time management and accountability. He was frustrated that projects were going overtime, budgets were out of control and his department was getting a reputation for being hard to work with. No one wanted one of Bob’s team on their project. “These are good people,” he told us, “but they just are not performing.”

**When good people underperform there is always a reason, but it’s rarely what appears on the surface.** The first step to improved performance is finding out how aligned they are. Sure, everyone has a “mission statement,” but what really is the focus for the group? Have you ever tried to walk a straight line while looking down? When you look back you will see that your footsteps wander all over the place. Only when you focus on something further away will you be able to walk straight.

**This is what a shared purpose does for the team.** Reacting to emergent issues is like walking with your focus on the ground – without looking, up it’s hard to determine which activities will help you reach your goal.

**Just looking up is not enough** – your whole team needs to be headed to the same goal. In Bob’s situation, not only was everyone only focused on the immediate needs of their specific tasks, but
when we interviewed them, all eight team members had a different idea of the team’s mission (this is more common than you would guess). To make things worse, they thought they had to deal equally with each task. So the team was wandering on the beach in different directions, trying to pick up every rock they saw. No wonder they were not getting results.

**Identifying their focus meant looking at how the team could best support organizational priorities.** Once the team understood this, it was easy to prioritize. Team members even started to say “no” to requests that were off target, and Bob backed them up. With a clear sense of direction, and the ongoing support from their leader, they didn’t fall back to being reactive. Within a few months, the team was exceeding their goals and getting the appreciation they had always deserved.

**Mindset Shit #4 – Shift from fear of failure to appreciation for learning opportunities**

- A top performer avoids mistakes.

- **A leader helps their team fail their way to success.**

**Success is probably the single greatest challenge for any leader** – not being successful but letting go of the need to always win. Think back on the challenges you had over the past year – how many times did you succeed? How many times did you fail? How do you know?

**Years ago leaders had it much easier.** The problems they had to solve today were pretty similar to the ones they would solve
tomorrow. Turn raw recruits into soldiers, keep the assembly line running or sell as many vacuums as possible. In that kind of environment, it is possible to look back and assess what went wrong and fix it. Today, yesterday’s solution rarely fixes tomorrow’s problems.

**Leaders who are driven to win tend to over-plan** – as the fear of failing pushes them to keep analysing long after the project should have started.

**There is a game we play with teams that involves** marshmallows and spaghetti. The idea is to build the tallest tower you can that will support an egg. Oddly, when kids in kindergarten are given the same challenge they can beat industry leaders and engineers! Why? Because while the leaders are good at creating a plan and executing it, the kids just get right in there and build – then test, learn, rebuild, repeat until eventually they figure out the best way to build their towers. It gets messy because those early prototypes don’t keep the eggs up for long, but the end result is always better than any initial plan.

**Instead of looking back to figure out what went wrong, leaders must look forward to better achievement objectives.** If you never identify anything as an absolute “success” or a “failure” it’s easier to leverage strengths and build on any results.

**Mindset Shift Case Study #4**

**Tim owned a small family run business where half of the staff were friends and relatives.** Problems had started to arise and finger-pointing and blaming was causing stress and impacting customers, so he wanted to find a way to move forward together.
Feed Forward (you haven’t defined this) gave them a way to learn from the past without the stress that comes from judging. The payoff was not just improved relationships but significantly faster growth. (I think this case study could be a lot longer, comparable to the others)

As you learn to “fail your way to success” you’ll find that instead of being upset when things go wrong, you will appreciate the learning opportunity – you will take the time to stop, learn, and then move forward again without blame or judgement. You’ll find that people will have the courage to take risks, knowing that if things don’t work as planned, it won’t be the end of the world.

You don’t necessarily need the structure of a Feed Forward to help your team. What matters most is to get out of assessing results as “success” or “failure” and shift to seeing everything as an ongoing learning opportunity where you head towards a goal in steps and stages. Get out of analysis paralysis by moving to action quickly and then pausing to learn, redirect as necessary and then move forward again. This way every project will ultimately achieve or exceed its goal.

Gallop said that seven in ten leaders do not have what it takes.

My real-life experience proves this isn’t true.

Anyone who truly wants to lead others can make the transition. It’s not easy and no single training program will teach you what you need to know, however the focus needs to be on the
Mindset Shifts outlined in this article, not trying to copy common leadership traits.

The first step is getting unstuck from the Expert Mindset. Unless and until that happens you will not be able to make the shift from boss to leader.

Achieving a leadership mindset can be accelerated with a combination of training, coaching, feedback, mentoring, experiential exercises and, most importantly, an organizational culture that supports the leadership mindset.

The payback is enormous. Seventy percent of team improvements can be directly related to the job of the immediate manager. Organizations succeed and fail based on the strengths of their leaders.

You can start today. The first step is simply getting unstuck from the “Expert Mindset.”

Think of the last time you completed a task that could or should have been done by one of your team members. Was there a project that someone else started and you finished? Is there a task you are leading that could be delegated to someone else?

• Identify how this could be driven by a Expert Mindset

• Identify how you personally benefitted in the past from doing things this way or using a Performance mindset – Rewards? Recognition? Pride?
• Ask yourself, “What is the cost of sticking to this mindset,” for me, for my team, for my organization?

• Think about, “If I was to take a Leadership Mindset what would I do differently?”

• Identify what new possibilities will open up if you use a new Leadership Mindset.

• Select one action that you will do on this task, based on the Leadership Mindset.

Allow yourself to fail to succeed – keep trying, learn from what works and from what doesn’t, but stay focussed on your goal and you will soon see significant improvements. In my experience, the payoffs become very clear within three months, and within a year it can be hard to remember why you did things in the old way.

Good luck! It’s not always easy, but it’s definitely worth the effort as the ultimate payoff is so big.

About Sharon Quarrington

Put in a bio that proves you can do what you talk about in this article.

Next Steps

- Offer something like a complimentary “Leadership Mindset Session.” Explain what this entails and then give contact information. Often you will send this article after a short
conversation with someone and after setting up such a session. This article will help them understand better what you do.

**Some Comments**

Sharon this is a really good article. One of the best I’ve read. Everything flows very well and you build a very solid case for what you advocate. I found myself feeling very excited about this work. And your prove things with interesting stories for each Mindset shift.

I made a few changes here and there to improve clarity.

I also changed the title as I felt the old one really didn’t fit the article.

Right now, your biggest issue in writing is punctuation. I’ve corrected most of the mistakes (I may have missed a few).

Lots of problems with not enough commas, run-on sentences, lack of hyphenation of some words, use of punctuation for quotations and a few other things. I’d recommend you always have a trained proofer look over your materials before finalizing them.

Also, note that the standard space between sentences is one space only, not two, three or four!

Also, I highly recommend not using Calibri as your font. That’s what your document showed. It’s too small and has all sorts of problems.
When I started to write a lot when I started my eZine, I bought a copy of Strunk and White and really drilled myself on punctuation, sentence structure, etc. It’s a very small book but very useful. Still, I have all my eZines proofed as I still make small mistakes in punctuation and grammar.

Please complete your bio and call-to-action and make any other minor changes you think are necessary, and then send me the final copy.

Cheers, Robert