



Korn Ferry Global Study Cites Lack of Executive Sponsorship as the Chief Roadblock to Leadership Development Success

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Half of Executive Respondents Describe Leadership Development Investments as “Fair” to “Very Poor”

LOS ANGELES--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Dec. 10, 2015-- A comprehensive [global study](#) by Korn Ferry (NYSE:KFY), the preeminent global people and organizational advisory firm, points to why leadership development efforts may not be successful in many organizations, and offers tangible advice on how to course correct for better outcomes.

Korn Ferry’s “Real World Leadership” study of more than 7,500 executives from 107 countries found that a “lack of executive sponsorship” is the chief barrier to successful leadership development efforts.

Survey respondents indicate there is not only a general lack of active sponsorship, buy-in, and support from the top, but also express disappointment in leadership development programs, with 55 percent of respondents ranking their return on such efforts as only “fair” to “very poor.”

“Executives have identified the crux of the problem. The next step is to identify practical steps to create a solution,” said Korn Ferry senior partner and global head of leadership development, Noah Rabinowitz. “Given the central role leadership plays in the success of any organization, the view of leadership development has to shift from a ‘nice to have’ to a ‘must have’ business process, as integral as the supply chain, marketing or IT. Organizations are already investing heavily in leadership development, but they want to ensure that these resources are being spent wisely and producing desired results.

The study also found that executives say filling gaps in their leadership pipeline is a top leadership development priority, articulating a clear business case to establish effective development programming.

“The first step in gaining executive buy-in for leadership development is to start with strategic business needs,” said Korn Ferry principal consultant, Dési Kimmins. “Executives must examine what challenges the organization currently faces, where the business is going, and the leadership profile that will help the company get where it needs to go. This process starts with the C-suite, and must sustain that level of endorsement and sponsorship to be successful. The most senior leaders need to engage in the development strategy and insist the impact is regularly measured and reported.”

Beyond the need for senior executives to set the development strategy for the entire organization, the study highlights a need for top leaders to take part in their own development. A common mistake is to assume that executive development should be pared down as executives move to higher levels in the organization.

“People assume that development happens naturally, but that’s not necessarily the case,” Kimmins warns. “A CEO, for example, not only has to run a business but also deal with a large number of external stakeholders, such as shareholders, the board of directors, business partners and even the media – which he or she has not likely done before. That’s why stepping into the CEO role is sometimes described as a career change, not just another step on the career ladder. Development and feedback even at this level are essential when so much is at stake.”

The report offers specific tips for increasing the effectiveness of leadership development and creating a robust and sustainable leadership pipeline:

- Embed leadership development in the culture and strategy, ensuring it is consistently sponsored by top executives.
- Embrace the idea that leadership development is a continuous process and not just made up of one-time classes or one-off events.
- Make leadership development more relevant and engaging by focusing programs on the organization’s current strategies and business issues.
- Roll out relevant and appropriate development for all levels in the organization, including senior-most executives and the C-suite.
- Don’t cut back on investing in leadership development when times get tough. That is the time to double down on efforts.

“There are some companies that are very successful at leadership development,” said Rabinowitz. “They’ve made it a part of their culture and it’s something they constantly work at. Organizations that want to strengthen their pipelines and fill critical talent gaps would do well to make leadership development a much higher priority and build a culture around it.”

About the Study

Korn Ferry commissioned a comprehensive, global survey of views on leadership development in July and August of 2015. The survey generated more than 7,500 responses from 107 countries.

The breakdown of the respondents is as follows:

- C-suite (26 percent)

- VP/SVP/EVP (31 percent)
- Director (27 percent)
- Other (16 percent)

About Korn Ferry

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