



## The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

### ***Who's the Landscape Leader in Your Company?*** ***June 30, 2008***

*In this month's 60-Second Email™, why you'll find leadership development in your own backyard, literally.*

My back lawn looks funny these days; it's filled with grass plugs. Truth be told, part of my backyard looks more like a sandbox than a lawn (the soil is very sandy here in this part of the southeast US). When I used to live in Montreal and New York, I wasn't so involved in my lawn. I did the usual cutting, watering, the occasional fertilizing, etc., but the stakes weren't so high. If neglected, the lawn just turned brown. Here, my lawn went from beyond brown to being non-existent. In some sections, it's a non-lawn.

What's embarrassing is that when we bought our house 5 years ago, my backyard looked more like a putting green than a beach. Under my care, we've seen a gradual decline in the shade of green. Last year, I had the wisdom (some might say I capitulated) to engage my neighbor who runs his own landscaping company. The care of my lawn is now subject to his oversight, knowledge, and care. Needless to say, things are looking much better.

As I reflected on my lawn, I noticed the parallels between its current state and the state of leadership development in some companies today.

To ensure a healthy, vibrant lawn requires dedicated attention over a long period of time. It requires consistent and persistent effort. It can't be done periodically. If it is, you end up with a beach, not a lawn. Similarly, with leadership development, success depends on a consistent focus. Although the need for great leaders in a company may be immediate and critical, the ability to respond effectively to that need hinges on how the company has been developing its leaders over many previous years.

To be truly great, your lawn needs to be fertilized routinely. If not, it stagnates, or worse, gets sick and dies (I cite as evidence, my backyard a few months ago). Similarly, existing and potential leaders need routine development and leadership challenge. Doing it in fits and starts gets you nowhere, and, moreover, frustrates your targeted leaders.



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You also need the right type of fertilizer. Not all fertilizer works with all types of lawn (I found that out the hard way). Leadership development is not, in general, a one-size-fits-all approach. Certainly, there are common skills and values you want all your leaders to possess fully. But beyond that, leadership development becomes idiosyncratic. Different leaders respond to and need different development opportunities.

Finally, there is one important difference between a great lawn and great leadership development. As the person responsible for the health and success of your lawn, if you don't have a green thumb, you can, and probably should, get someone who can do it for you. Ideally someone who knows what he or she is doing (the results tend to be better - trust me).

However, if you're the head of a company, division, department, or team, you can't outsource leadership development. The buck stops with you. Sure, it's wise to tap expertise to assist you if you don't know the best approach for developing fully capable leaders. But ultimately, you're the one who determines whether it's a short-term fad, an afternoon program, the next best-selling "Top 10 Things All Leaders Need to Know" book, or ideally and instead: a fundamental long-term commitment to connect the success of your company's business strategy with the full potential and capability of your current and emerging leaders.

You can access this and previous issues of our 60-Second Email™ newsletter via the following link to our website: <http://www.advisoryalliance.com/newsletter.php>

Until next month,

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