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The Hidden Leader

Discover and Develop Greatness Within Your Company

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

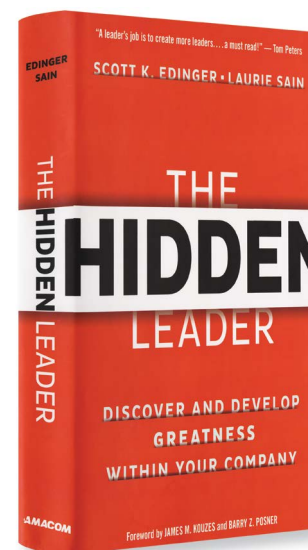
Think you can spot the leaders in your company? Don't assume that you can identify them by their positions. What about those employees who consistently step up: the field agent who solves a previously intractable problem; the service rep who thinks outside the box and creates unshakeable customer loyalty.

These are more than "good employees." These are "hidden leaders," and they are critical to an organization's long-term success. Managers today need to make the most of all their resources, and *The Hidden Leader* shows them how to recognize and cultivate these talented but under-utilized employees, who demonstrate integrity, lead through authentic relationships, focus on results, work from clear customer purpose and fulfill the value promise of the company.

Supported by real-world examples of hidden leaders in action, *The Hidden Leader* helps managers discover these secret saviors and enable them to deliver even greater value to customers.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- To recognize and nurture hidden leaders in your organization.
- The four facets of hidden leadership.
- Why integrity is non-negotiable in hidden leadership.
- The difference between customer service and customer purpose.
- How to engage hidden leaders at the individual and organizational levels.



by Scott K. Edinger
and Laurie Sain

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE HIDDEN LEADER

by Scott K. Edinger and Laurie Sain

The authors: Scott Edinger is recognized as an expert in helping organizations achieve measurable business results. Companies like AT&T, Lenovo, and *The Los Angeles Times* hire Scott Edinger to work with their senior leaders. A professional writer and instructional designer, Laurie Sain has defined content and created learning models for nearly 500,000 professionals, frontline supervisors and workers. Her clients have included Apple, the Union Pacific, Fidelity Investments and Charles Schwab. *The Hidden Leader: Discover and Develop Greatness Within Your Company* by Scott K. Edinger and Laurie Sain. Copyright © 2015 by Scott K. Edinger and Laurie Sain. Summarized by permission of the publisher, AMACOM. 240 pages, \$24.95, ISBN 978-0-814-43399-7. Summary copyright ©2015 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries www.summary.com, 1-800-SUMMARY. For more information on the authors, go to www.summary.com.

What Is a Hidden Leader?

Hidden leaders are all around you within your organization. You have worked with them, encouraged them, and seen them rise within organizations to positions of power and influence.

You and others have called these workers smart, crucial, effective or an important part of the company. You have seen them work effectively with people at many levels within the organization, from front lines to executive suites, regardless of their formal positions. But if you thought at all about these employees' abilities, you probably categorized them as having natural talent that couldn't be replicated. You didn't see them as leaders.

What makes them "hidden" is not that their coworkers and supervisors do not value them as important players within the company. It is that management does not think of them as leaders with the potential to drive excellence throughout the organization.

These hidden leaders are a source of great strategic advantage in your company. They can be defined, identified, nurtured and encouraged to help an organization develop a competitive edge. They are the powerhouses within organizations who help galvanize people toward excellence.

The power of hidden leaders is obvious to those around them. These top individual contributors are known as the ones to approach for tough problems, the people new hires are directed to meet to understand the company's inner workings, and the anchors of productivity, creativity and innovation.

Hidden leaders affect the bottom line of an organization in several ways. They strive to fulfill the company's value promise; they enable effective shortcuts to be devised without sacrificing quality; they inspire others

around them to do their best work. Managers who identify and treat them as leaders gain an important strategic and competitive advantage over the competition. ●

The Dynamics of Hidden Leadership

Before you can identify and develop hidden leaders, it's important to know what hidden leadership is. The dynamics of hidden leadership are more than effectiveness, friendliness and productivity. They encompass specific facets of behavior and attitude that result in these leaders fulfilling the value promise of your organization.

The Four Facets of Hidden Leadership

As a manager, you must understand each of these four facets in depth, including what drives them in hidden leaders and what undermines them in terms of systems or support. You will then be able to discover hidden leaders in your organization and develop them appropriately to strengthen your company's competitive opportunities.

Demonstrates Integrity: Integrity, by its definition, means adhering consistently to a strong, reliable code of ethics, whatever that code is.

Demonstrating integrity is the absolute bottom-line requirement of hidden leadership. Hidden leaders are known for their integrity and for acting on it in difficult situations where some might forgo commitments and lean on moral flexibility. But hidden leaders do not. Their integrity shows consistently along the way. An observer can identify it in actions, words and attitudes. To demonstrate integrity, a person must have the courage to consistently adhere to a strong ethical code, even in difficult situations.



1-800-SUMMARY
service@summary.com

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Rebecca S. Clement, Publisher; Sarah T. Dayton, Editor in Chief; Ashleigh Imus, Senior Editor; Amanda Langen, Graphic Designer; A. Imus, Contributing Editor

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By “a strong ethical code,” we mean more than simply not lying, cheating or stealing. Those characteristics are the minimum expectations for any employee — the absence of outright dishonest behavior. A strong ethical code is built on positive, action-oriented, baseline beliefs that guide behavior. Hidden leaders may not be able to describe those beliefs, but others will see them consistently in action.

Leads Through Relationships: Demonstrating integrity is a sine qua non for hidden leaders. But they also lead through relationships, because those relationships are important to them personally. Essentially, leading through relationships requires an authentic, honest interest in others at many levels of an organization. This is evidenced and created by certain skills, attitudes and characteristics.

Hidden leaders, whether in a position of authority or not, display this ability to lead through relationships, or relational leadership. Essentially, those who lead through relationships

- Use interpersonal skills effectively.
- Exercise a sense of curiosity.
- Value others.
- Believe in their own personal value to others, whether as a co-worker or as a friend.

Focuses on Results: By focusing on results related to paying customers’ needs, a hidden leader makes things happen for customers, co-workers and the company. When does a hidden leader focus on results? When the hidden leader maintains a wide perspective and acts with independent initiative. The result is individual engagement at a level that achieves more than knowledge, experience or positive thinking alone. It entails using the end to define the means.

When the end defines the means, hidden leaders don’t just do a job. They aim for the end they are supposed to produce — the goal. This goal usually benefits both the customer and the company. It doesn’t depend on the established process, the status quo or the personal needs of the leader.

Remains Customer Purposed: Being customer purposed is different from providing customer service or being customer driven. Being customer purposed means seeing the big picture of the company’s value promise and acting in ways that enable that promise. This is more than a sense of “customer service,” which implies that the one serving the customer will do anything to make the customer happy (possibly to the company’s detriment).

The primary distinction of customer-purposed hidden leaders is that they focus on delivering their company’s value promise during every aspect of the customer experience. ●

Identify Hidden Leaders

The perfect and fully developed hidden leader displays all these behaviors. You may notice people you think are leaders, who are strong in only two aspects or perhaps one. But how can a manager know if a particular person has the potential for hidden leadership in spite of skill deficits?

When two of the three characteristics are present, you will see distinctive roles and reputations in potential hidden leaders. We have identified them as the short-term visionary, the busywork-er and the lone wolf. Each of these types lacks one of the key characteristics of the true hidden leader.

The Short-Term Visionary

The short-term visionary combines results and relationships to produce action. Generally, these workers are effective in getting things done — at least things relevant to the short-term success of the company. They are continually in achievement mode, clicking off tasks, completing assignments and accomplishing goals, all while keeping relationships intact.

However, the short-term visionary is missing the customer-purposed characteristics of a true hidden leader. This frequently leads to actions that produce short-term gains at the expense of long-term results. Because they are not customer purposed, these potential hidden leaders lack the voice of the customer in their actions. As a result, they are in danger of making decisions that address localized, internal issues at the expense of customers.

When you as a manager see short-term visionaries, remember that a customer-purposed attitude can be developed. Do not discount the importance of people with strong relationships throughout the organization and an ability to focus on results.

The Busywork-er

Have you ever noticed an employee who is incredibly busy but seems to contribute very little to the company’s long-term success? These well-intended professionals frequently have good relationships and exhibit a strong customer purpose. They certainly display a good work ethic, and they do get things done, especially routine assignments or marginally important projects. But without a focus on results, odds are that these workers will accomplish very little that contributes much to the value desired by customers or the long-term health of the organization.

The busywork-er lacks the characteristic of a focus on results. Without that focus, the person has no yardstick by which to measure the importance of specific tasks. Many

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busywork-ers have tremendous planning and execution skills as well as excellent relationships. They do maintain the centrality of the customer, which helps them make tactical decisions.

But without the end game in mind, they may expend energy on projects and ideas that are good but not as valuable as they might be to the organization or the customer. They get results, but the results may not be in line with the company's strategic objectives.

The Lone Wolf

We call a potential hidden leader who lacks the ability to lead through relationships a lone wolf. In some situations, a lone wolf can be an asset. Especially where technical requirements are key, a lone wolf can accept an assignment, understand its importance and do it well. Many people with specialized or concentrated knowledge in a variety of fields, from software development to finance to law to medicine, fall into this category and produce great work for a company.

But lone wolves are unlikely to develop into hidden leaders. Without support from others in an organization, it is difficult for anyone to provide effective leadership. Project work generally occurs horizontally in companies. To lead effectively, a hidden leader must garner support across silos and work with multiple constituencies among different functions in the organization. Lacking that ability, the hidden leader is reduced to a lone wolf: an effective and productive person but not someone considered to be a leader. ●

Enable Integrity

While hidden leaders display integrity in all their activities, sometimes much of their work is done in solitude or within a small group. This can make it difficult for those uninvolved in the team to see the leader's integrity in action. The challenge for managers is observing visible evidence of integrity when the hidden leader is not in the immediate vicinity. In many cases, the manager must watch and listen for this evidence in the comments, responses and actions of others — those who depend on hidden leaders in the organization and know the leaders' integrity can be depended on in the toughest situations. When a manager hears employees suggest solutions that consistently include asking for help from a specific individual, that individual may be a hidden leader known to everyone on the front line.

How Can You Support Integrity?

Hopefully, your organization looks for and hires people who are moral and ethical in general. You begin with people whose values are consistent with the stated ones of the company.

However, courage and consistency in behaving with integrity can be encouraged or discouraged by co-workers, supervisors and managers. Company structures and organizational responses can discourage people's ability to show integrity. They can make it difficult for employees to maintain moral positions contrary to demands of the organization. Such company structures and responses are especially influential when they organically conflict with the company's stated values.

It is especially important that positional leaders show strong support when hidden leaders demonstrate integrity. We believe that this support takes three important forms:

- Responding positively to integrity
- Incorporating integrity into the culture
- Showing integrity yourself when it counts most: facing ethical dilemmas.

Does Your Culture Support Integrity?

It is one thing for an organization to employ people who demonstrate integrity. It is another thing for an organization's culture to support that integrity.

You can determine if your culture supports integrity by paying attention to everyday efforts and results. Does your company regularly deliver on its promises to customers? Are commitments met? Do people consistently act in the best interests of the enterprise, the customer, company stakeholders and employees? Do workers get honest feedback about how they might improve performance? Are conversations genuine and productive in the face of conflicts? Do people believe they have contributed significantly to the organization? A company culture that can answer "yes" to all of these questions has aligned its actions with its integrity. ●

Build Essential Relational Skills

Hidden leaders with strong relational leadership develop and use critical interpersonal skills whether or not they have been officially trained in them. The hidden leader's life experiences, combined with an interest in others, make these leaders more self-aware than nonleaders. This self-awareness emerges as compassion and empathy for other people. Given a baseline of interest in others, a hid-

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den leader can learn these skills and integrate them into everyday performance easily.

Relational leaders do three critical things that help build emotional connections beyond basic relational skills:

- They pay attention to others.
- They make an effort to connect.
- They time conversations to coincide with their own positive moods.

Developing Essential Relational Skills

Hidden leaders consistently use a specific set of observable skills.

Face-to-Face Communication Skills: Authentic relationships entail communicating one-on-one with people. For our purposes, “face to face” means the fundamental methods two people use to communicate verbally and initiate, build and maintain strong interpersonal relationships. These skills are verbal ones. Specific features include sharing information, clarifying and confirming, and acknowledging others.

Transparent Critical Thinking: Transparent critical thinking is the ability to make verbal connections for people between the facts or assumptions that support an argument and the conclusions or solutions. Transparent critical thinkers verbalize their thought process so others can see how they came to a conclusion or the rationale behind a solution. Hidden leaders who make their critical thinking transparent trust the listeners, and the listeners are confident that there are not hidden agendas at work in the situation.

Crediting Others: Hidden leaders know that it is rare for a great accomplishment to be achieved by one person in a vacuum. Multiple contributors at many levels are involved in a success. Hidden leaders not only pay attention to the potentially unsung contributors to success, they make sure they give them public credit for their contributions. This willingness to credit others’ contributions strengthens relationships deeply.

Honest and Complete Critiques: Hidden leaders believe that most people do their best, but they also know that people make mistakes. Because they truly value relationships, hidden leaders want to help others improve their performance however possible. One of the tools hidden leaders use to help others is to provide honest and complete critiques of actions, behaviors or work products. Hidden leaders’ honest and complete critiques use a simple structure that is designed to help the other person, not harm. Honest and complete critiques focus on the content, maintain the person’s value and build with information.

Effective Conflict Resolution: Good conflicts — those of ideas, priorities, goals and opinions — respond well to transparent critical thinking and logical, systematic approaches to solutions. Hidden leaders handle these situations well because they are confident in the power of methodical processes and rational conclusions. They also succeed at managing these conflicts because they trust that those involved have the good of the customer and the company at heart. We call these creative conflicts, because often the results or solutions that emerge are better than the two initial options combined.

In creative conflicts, hidden leaders use their communication skills to identify facts, assumptions, goals and priorities among the parties involved. Then they search for ways to combine all the stated goals into one systematic solution. This ability to synthesize solutions from conflicting ideas makes hidden leaders the relational anchor points for people involved in the conflict. ●

Create a Focus on Results

Few things make a difference in a company like hidden leaders who are focused on results. So what is it that allows a hidden leader to sustain a powerful focus on results? We maintain it is the presence of two characteristics: taking initiative and maintaining a wide perspective.

However, these aspects must be combined in the right amounts in the hidden leader. An imbalance of either trait leads to a very different type of person on the job. Consider these roles that emerge from combinations of initiative and perspective:

Plodder (Low Initiative, Narrow Perspective).

Each of us has seen these ineffective people at work. They equate process with productivity and control with competence. Not only do these employees rank low in both initiative and innovation, they squelch those properties in the people around them. If they happen to be in formal leadership positions, their teams face demands for constant reports documenting progress. A frontline employee with low initiative and a narrow perspective can stop progress by insisting on sticking to the rules of the company or slowing team progress until not much is accomplished.

Dreamer (Wide Perspective, Low Initiative). These employees — and sometimes leaders — are at least headed in the right direction. They know the importance of keeping the end goal in sight. But they are unlikely to take decisive action without approval from above. The result is someone who can talk the talk but rarely walks the walk.

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Hyper-Actor (Narrow Perspective, High Initiative). These frenetic employees take initiative for action but keep no output or broader perspective in mind. They change their stated goals regularly and may profess conflicting priorities. When they are unsure of what to do, they become more frenzied and achieve less.

Hidden Leader (Wide Perspective, High Initiative). These leaders — and they are leaders, although their titles may reflect otherwise — couple a clear line of sight toward the goal with the energy and initiative to take action, with or without approval from above. Because they let the end define the means, their actions connect to critical goals for the company and customers.

Building Individual Engagement

When they focus on results, hidden leaders maintain a broad perspective and take independent initiative to act. As hidden leaders maintain this focus over time, they become more engaged in their jobs.

Engagement happens when anyone, hidden leaders included, makes progress toward meaningful results. This progress and engagement result in people feeling happy and rewarded. The positive energy that results makes them much more likely to innovate.

By maintaining a broad perspective, hidden leaders more easily attribute meaning to everyday actions because their actions — the means — are defined by the desired results — the end. These leaders' personal initiative enables them to clearly see how their individual actions contribute to the desired goal. ●

Instill Customer Purpose

Customer purpose drives hidden leaders to see their work in light of the value it provides to the paying customer. It reaches beyond customer service to include the big picture facing an organization at any given point.

You can enable customer purpose in your employees by ensuring that they all understand the same definition of “customer” and can link the company's value promise to their specific tasks.

Customer Purpose Isn't Customer Service

By its nature, customer service responds to customer needs. It isn't completely passive, but a customer must be identified and a need declared before service can be offered. It is a critical aspect of a company's performance.

In contrast, being customer purposed means proactively envisioning how any task affects the value provided to

the customer by the company. It means being a visionary in the context of a specific job and with the company's value promise in mind, as well as stated or potential needs of customers.

Customer purpose creates value. Inside the organization, it translates into customer-focused processes, products and services. From the outside, customer purpose builds a better customer experience. It strengthens a company's business relationships with its customers, which is a distinct competitive advantage. Your competitors may be able to replicate products, services and processes, but they cannot replicate a strong business relationship — especially if hidden leaders are the foundation of that relationship.

The Source of Customer Purpose

The source of being customer purposed is a deep understanding of the value promise of an organization. In organizations where the executive suite believes in communicating the true value promise organization-wide, hidden leaders can easily link their everyday actions to the company's purpose.

In those organizations that make no effort to help employees understand the value promise, customer-purposed hidden leaders make the effort to think through what the company is truly delivering to its customers — including future ones. It's helpful when an organization educates its employees on its value promise to customers.

But when that is not the case, hidden leaders are able to be customer purposed because they engage five distinctive characteristics:

Enthusiasm for the work: Enthusiasm born of a belief in the value to the customers drives hidden leaders to make the customers' needs their purpose. This enthusiasm influences those around them, both colleagues and customers.

Balanced skill/communications proficiency: Customer-purposed hidden leaders ask great questions, not just to uncover needs but to understand the issues from a customer's point of view. They evaluate the customer's or stakeholder's level of knowledge about the problem and product or service and talk in language that makes sense and provides value.

A Sense of Urgency: Customer purpose requires a sense of urgency on the part of the hidden leader. But urgency is not speed. It is a commitment to act, to not stop until the customer's needs are met. This sense of urgency — of believing that the customer's needs are too important to ignore in the short or long term — is a driving force behind the hidden leader's sense of being customer

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purposed. A sense of urgency provides the “why” behind the “what” of being customer purposed.

An Owner’s Mindset: Hidden leaders bring the commitment of a company owner to their jobs. Daily, they come to work ready to make a difference and help the organization and its customers achieve their goals. This customer purpose exists because hidden leaders see themselves as responsible owners of the organization, not just employees. They take ownership of their jobs and their companies’ success. When a hidden leader acts like an owner, managers will see the leader reference company strategies in the process of making decisions in the workplace.

Behaving like an owner is not a subtle shift. It is a transformation that hidden leaders, with their self-ownership of actions, embody daily.

Being Champions of Change: Because they are customer purposed, hidden leaders look for ways to keep up with customer needs and market challenges. They are often the ones advocating improvements and responses to better meet customer needs. These champions of change will challenge the status quo, no matter their positions in the existing hierarchy. They are determined to serve the customer well, even if that means working against existing systems and assumptions. Hidden leaders use their strong communication and persuasion skills to challenge the status quo collaboratively.

Through their skills as champions of change, hidden leaders can be management’s secret weapon to help others in the organization accept, commit to and implement change initiatives. Engaging hidden leaders in change implementation helps clarify the change process for others because the leaders focus on what is best for the customer. ●

Measure Performance

When it comes to measuring performance, how do you use the characteristics and skills we have identified as belonging to hidden leaders? People can be measured as if they might be hidden leaders. Core characteristics and skills of hidden leaders can be helpful to anyone in your organization. By exposing employees to the characteristics and skills of hidden leaders over time, achieving high performance in these skills becomes the norm.

Bestselling author Neil Rackham talks about measuring performance as a way to improve, not to prove. Rather than using measurement to verify a result, use it as evi-

dence of growth or movement so you can make changes and adjustments.

Effective Performance-Measurement Systems

Hidden leadership characteristics offer guidance to ensure that your organization’s performance-measurement system is useful.

Focus on Results: Ensure that individuals’ goals link directly to the company’s strategy and tactics. If necessary, alter processes and procedures so they focus on attaining results for the customer. Make sure the end — your value promise — defines the means of getting there.

Centralize the Customer: Create measurement criteria that are customer purposed to strengthen the link between goals and your company’s value promise. Question a measurement or goal that cannot be directly linked to value for the paying customer. Reinforce and support those that clearly put the customer at the center.

Communicate Clearly: Visions and strategies are important. Just as critical, however, is management’s communication of and commitment to the what, how and why of these high-level concepts. When it comes to communication, once is not enough. Management must continually link ongoing tactics to strategic goals and the overall vision. Regular, consistent communication at all levels must reinforce the link.

Reward Initiative, Not Just Results: Rewarding a well-planned and well-conceived initiative is the pathway to innovation, even if the result is a failure or mediocre success. True innovations rarely work the first time. The classic story to illustrate this is that of Thomas Edison’s search for a suitable filament for the electric light bulb. According to various sources, Edison tested thousands of different elements before he succeeded in his quest. When he did succeed, his discovery enabled him to transform commercial lighting and electrical systems.

Customize Rewards: Remembering that different people value different reward mechanisms is important if hidden leaders are to be supported effectively. The most effective rewards are customized ones that individual people value personally. For that, managers must interact with workers and find out what is most important to them. Some prefer a quiet commendation or a word to upper management. Some like the pomp and circumstance of formal award ceremonies in front of their peers. For others, a sincere “thank you” and a special reward — for example, a flexible day off or an acknowledgment to a small team — is most important. ●

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Engaging Hidden Leaders

The purpose of understanding hidden leaders is to engage one of the most powerful strategic energy sources in your company. When these leaders are effectively engaged, a company creates fertile ground for existing hidden leaders and produces an environment that actively cultivates the development of many other employees as hidden leaders. A business able to engage and encourage hidden leadership has a competitive advantage that is invisible to competitors. It also helps the organization develop its productivity, innovation and performance potential.

Enabling Hidden Leadership

There are ways to structure cultures and companies so hidden leaders emerge and are engaged more easily. Here are 10 dimensions of performance that, when developed, create cultures of high performance and environments where hidden leaders thrive:

Communication: One of the many advantages of hidden leaders is that they act out the value promise of your business and bring your strategy to life. But they can do so only in an environment where the value promise is clearly understood and colleagues share information effectively.

Strategy and Goals: With clear strategy and goals, hidden leaders are freed up to focus on outcomes and results, with an understanding of what the company is trying to achieve.

Teamwork and Collaboration: An environment that encourages cooperation and collaboration, through conscious management and specific reward systems, provides hidden leaders many opportunities to use their influencing skills to the benefit of the organization.

Alignment: Cultures that align strategies and goals with tactics allow people to see the relationship between what they do and the contributions of others.

Organization and Learning: Hidden leaders look for ways to improve so that they are able to contribute more value to the business and to grow as individuals. One of the best rewards for hidden leaders is an investment in their development.

Capacity for Change: To improve your culture's capacity for change, ask hidden leaders about their observations, descriptions of a problem, and expectations of how a new approach will resolve the problem or create an innovation.

Customer Focus: When a company's culture reinforces delivering value for customers in its policies, procedures

and overall business attitudes, a hidden leader's capability to be customer purposed emerges readily.

Innovation: While recognizing that the people who are officially in charge according to the organization's structure guide and make final decisions, all company employees can offer critical thinking and innovative approaches to common, daily challenges.

Values: Hidden leaders are frequently great role models of an organization's values, especially when they align with the leader's personal ethical code.

Engagement and Commitment: The levels at which people in the organization participate and commit their best work sets a culture's tone. High levels of engagement nurture hidden leaders in all corners of the organization.

An organizational culture strong in these dimensions supports the achievement of a company's goals. It also enables hidden leaders to make their maximum contributions.

Hidden leaders exist. They are at work in your organization now. Based on their demonstrated integrity, they are questioning conclusions and driving issues to the fore. They are harnessing people's energy and power to get good work done, using relational skills, a focus on results and customer purpose. They make the work experience better for those in contact with them.

They may or may not meld with your company's culture perfectly, but they are there. Ignoring their influence may help maintain the status quo. It will also limit the value of your organization. By discovering and developing hidden leaders and acknowledging their contributions, you can expand both culture and value to fulfill your company's potential. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The Hidden Leader*, you'll also like:

1. ***Grounded* by Bob Rosen.** Rosen's new approach to leadership guides leaders to become more self-aware, develop their potential and drive better results for themselves, their teams and their organizations.
2. ***Unusually Excellent* by John Hamm.** Hamm offers both seasoned and aspiring leaders a framework of nine skills for understanding and applying the fundamentals of leadership at every stage in their careers.
3. ***The 360 Leader* by John C. Maxwell.** According to Maxwell, you can learn to develop your influence from wherever you are in the organization by becoming a 360-degree leader.