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LEVERAGING HR PROFESSIONALS TO DEVELOP LEADERS IN "REAL TIME"

By Linda Sharkey – GE Capital

WHAT WE KNOW

We have known for many years that leadership is not primarily learned in the classroom – it is learned on the job...In fact, most leaders prefer to learn in "real time," in the business setting, rather than in a classroom. From reading leadership literature, we also know that when discussing their leadership journeys, leaders very often cite a strong mentor or coach as a key component of their personal development.

While many successful leaders *understand* that coaching and feedback are important, reviews of 360° feedback summaries from major corporations almost always indicate that "provides effective coaching and feedback" is one of the lower-rated items for most managers. What can organizations do to help managers get and give the coaching they and their teams need? One answer is to hire external coaches.

However, organizations usually hire external coaches for individuals with uncommonly difficult interpersonal challenges. External coaches are often reserved for the most challenging cases and not used to help "good talent" get better. Another approach is to build coaching into the culture of the organization by developing internal coaching capability. This is precisely what GE Capital decided to do!

Developing HR Coaches at GE Capital

At GE Capital, we tapped into three key competencies: 1) our fierce focus on growing top-notch leaders, 2) our solid human resource expertise, and 3) our learning culture. Our process utilized a proven model for coaching. It also provided a framework for HR professionals to use in coaching others and in teaching others how to coach.

WHAT WE DID

Behavioral change expert Marshall Goldsmith and I talked about an approach. Outside coaching was not an option for us. We devised an approach that would teach the Behavioral Coaching Model to our senior HR managers and also prepare them to apply the model with our ELDS grads. The model focused on two key issues: 1) getting personal coaching and 2) teaching others how to coach.

Next, coaching triads were built into a one-day "Best-Practice Forum" on coaching. The triads consisted of two levels: 1) providing and modeling coaching using the process and 2) helping the triad plan how to use the process to coach others in their business. The two-pronged model is illustrated in figure 2.

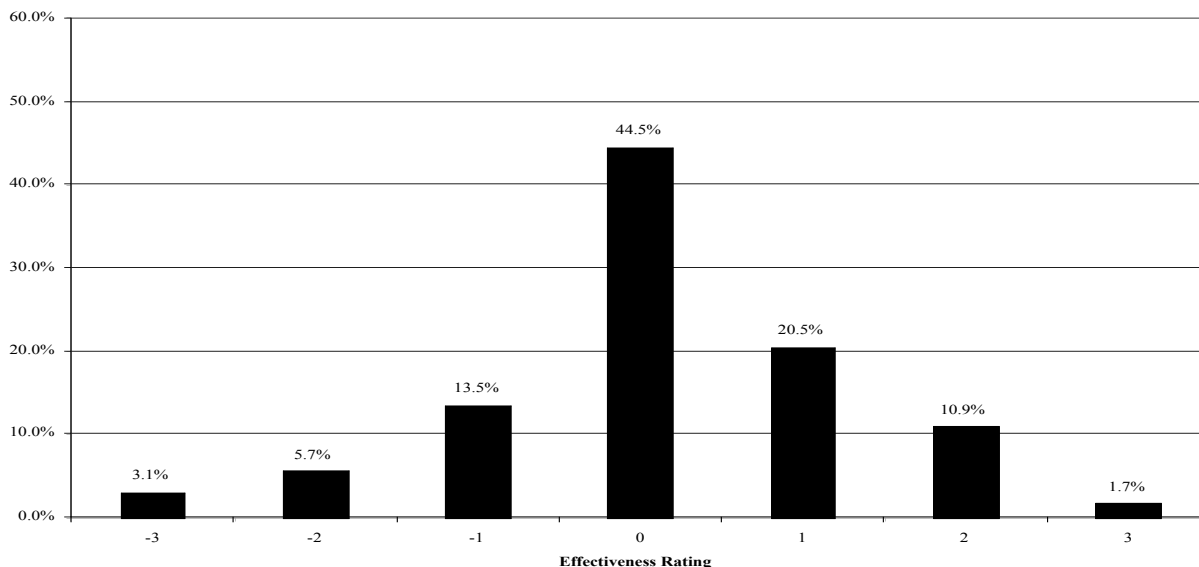
Our next challenge was to spread this process further in our organization. With Marshall's permission, we developed a train-the-trainer program for HR professionals and rolled it out worldwide. The approach is now widely used throughout our businesses.

THE RESULTS

The key question one might have is: what were the results? We decided to use the mini-survey methodology (again designed by Marshall) to see if we were documenting consistent improvements. The first round of mini-surveys showed that we had a 99 percent improvement rate—a great success! Building on this experience, we incorporated this approach into our leadership development process.

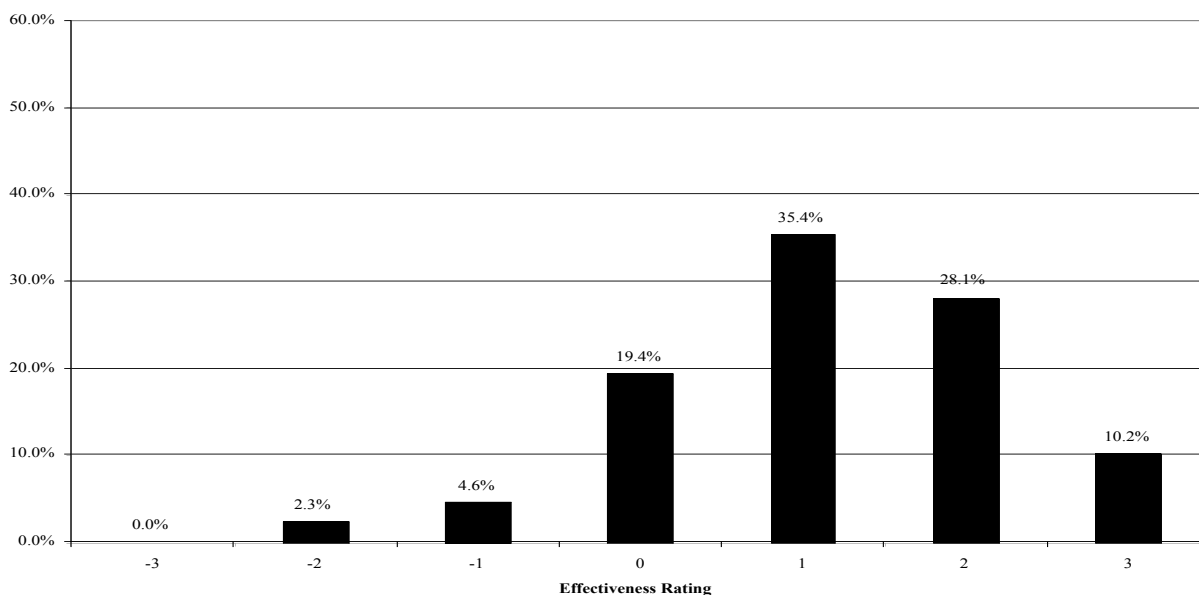
Our other observation is that *follow-up* is key to improvement. As part of the change process coachees were instructed to discuss what they wanted to change with their pre-selected co-workers. They were asked to follow-up to get ongoing “progress reports” on how they were doing. Tables 3, 5, and 7 show the degree to which the coachees followed-up with their coaches and selected co-workers. The follow-up rate correlates strongly with the coachee’s degree of improvement—a key element of success.

Table 3: No Perceptible Follow Up



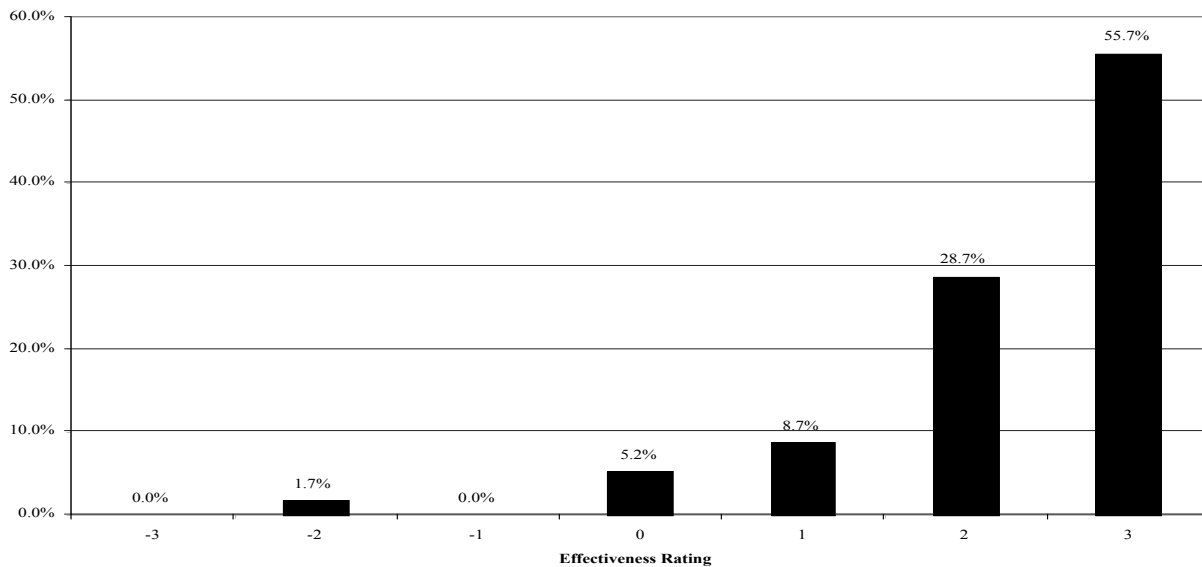
As you can see from Table 3, coachees who did not perceptible follow-up showed little more improvement than random chance.

Table 5: Some Follow Up



Participants who were credited with “some follow-up” showed a clear positive trend. Over 38% were rated in the “+2” to “+3” categories. This is nearly double the percentage in these categories when compared to “little follow-up”.

Table 7: Consistent (periodic) Follow Up



Participants who were seen as consistently (or periodically) following-up were rated as dramatically increasing in effectiveness. Over half were seen as improving at the “+3” level.

Next Generation

Realizing the power of internally applied coaching, we decided that an organization-wide 360° process would further support our efforts to keep our managers on the top of their leadership game. A consistent 360° process was launched for our leaders spanning around the world. We provided our leaders with a list of HR professionals that they could choose from to be their coach. Having the leader “select” the coach is a way that we built “ownership” into the process. Each leader selected a coach and spent time debriefing their 360° feedback with them and, in many cases, with his or her direct reports. We now have solid data upon which to continue to drive our leadership efforts, and we have our key global players aligned with an internal coach to work on personal development.

Because all of our leadership teams participated in the 360° process, they now work as teams to help each other improve. When the teams share their development needs and use the coaching model, they often find three things: 1) they have similar issues, 2) they get great improvement suggestions from each other, and 3) they get support from each other to improve.

LESSONS LEARNED AND ADVICE

In companies, the need to drive consistent leadership behaviors and organizational culture will be critical. Leveraging HR to be the corporate conscience; to help raise personal leadership issues is essential in the 21st century. Leadership development can’t be confined to the classroom. It must also be “real time” in the day-to-day work experience.

In our experience there were some critical lessons learned:

1. Use a consistent 360° assessment tool across your business that accurately reflects the leadership behaviors required for success.
2. Link coaching to the 360° process to ensure that actions are taken beyond the usual action plan.
3. Use your internal human resource professionals as coaches.
4. Ensure confidentiality of your HR coaches.
5. Drive an internal follow-up process through the mini-survey approach.
6. Cascade the 360° assessment and coaching model through the organization.
7. Make sure each HR professional has coaching responsibility for his or her teams

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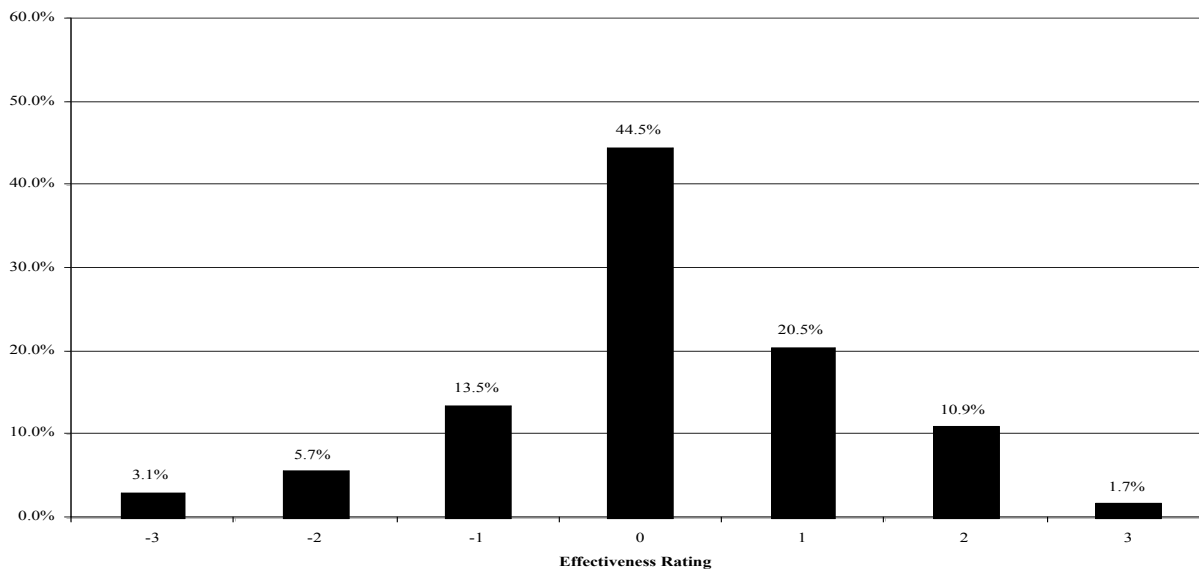
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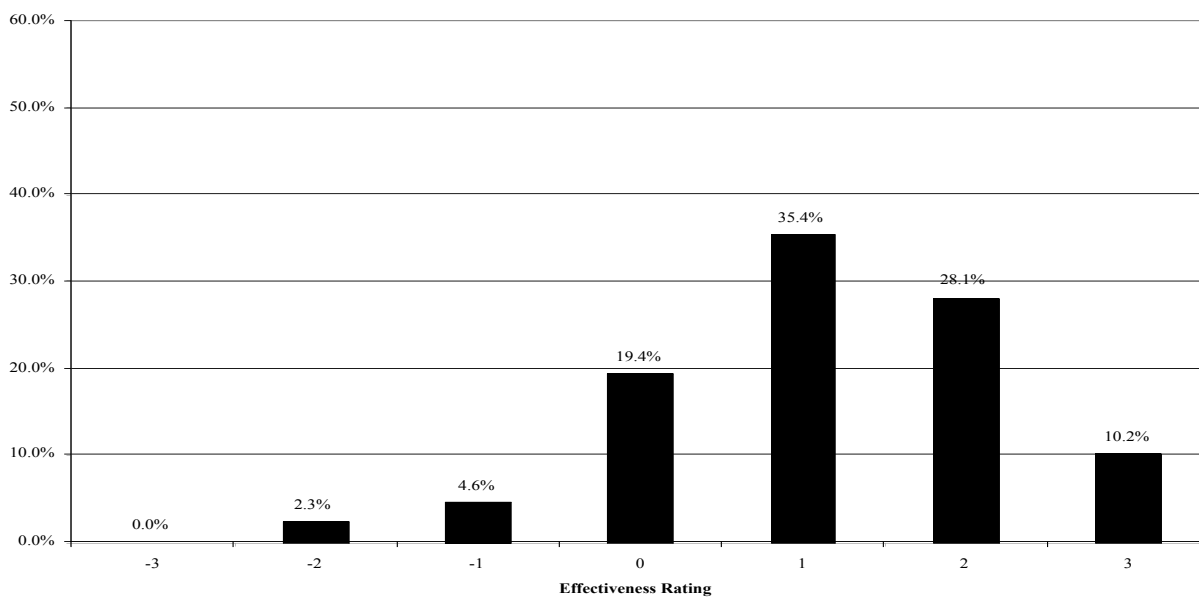
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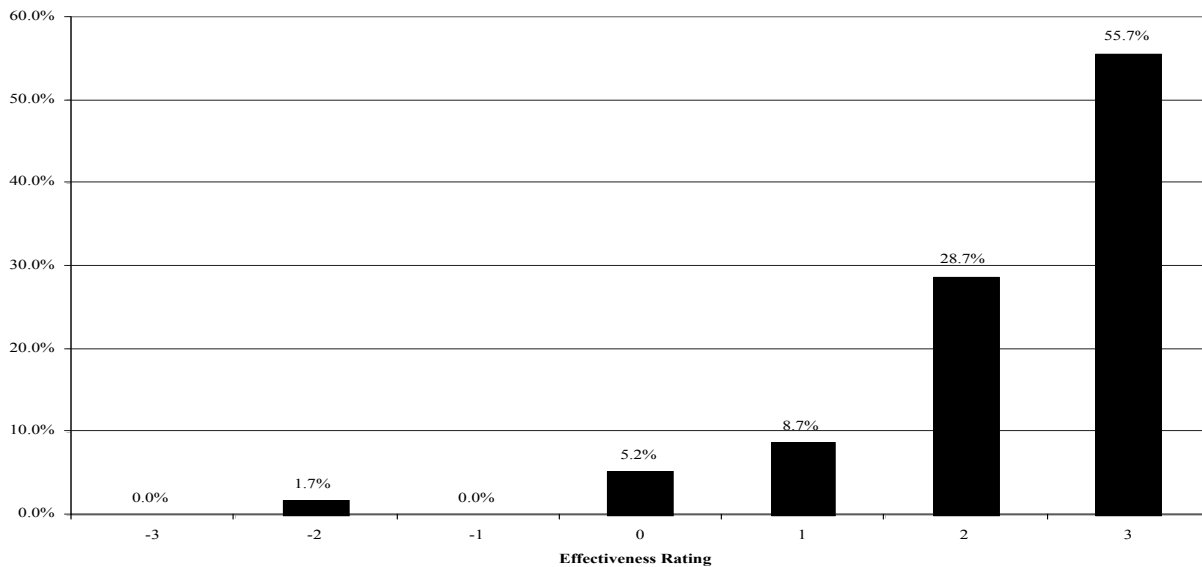
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