

## Adaptive Leadership

### Lesson 8-6: Adaptive Challenge – Current Issues

#### Discussion Guide – Confidentiality Reminder

#### One Word Check-in

#### Update – Personal, Business, Leadership

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*“Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding. Search for them as you would for silver, seek them like hidden treasures.” Proverbs 2:2-4 (NLT)*

**Most businesses face long-standing issues that have been ignored and need to be addressed.** The purpose of this lesson is for your group to identify issues in your own organization that should be addressed. You will learn that others have struggled or are struggling with the same issues. This lesson summarizes the current issues that we identified through interviews with local business leaders, whose revenues range from a few hundred thousand dollars to billions of dollars. Approximately 20 individuals were interviewed in 2024 across all industries.

**We asked all business leaders, “What do you see as the most significant issues that business leaders are ignoring today?”** Below is a summary of their answers (see page two for full summary of issues).

**People issues was the most prevalent issue, and at the top of the list was dealing with difficult individuals and toxic work environments.** One interviewee mentioned that he finally fired his best employee due to toxic behavior and was surprised by the significant increase in productivity afterward. Other issues included ignoring family problems within the business, poor communication skills of recent college graduates due to technology, poor employee engagement and retention, and challenge of finding quality applicants. Many candidates are using AI to craft their resumes and answer questions on employment applications.

**Second, leadership issues included egoistical leaders who believe they are irreplaceable.** This often drives away talented young leaders. Another issue was leaders' inability to think and adapt at the pace of change, which results in ineffective decision-making. Another issue was firing employees without considering their contributions to the company.

**Finally, business issues include an overinflated view of their value to clients, prioritizing profit at the expense of their staff, and poor transitions of ownership and leadership.** Many firms pass ownership to family members, regardless of whether they are effective leaders or respected by the staff.

**Issue sharing.** Each person in the group should take one minute to share a current significant issue at work that is being ignored but really needs to be addressed. Next, the group selects one issue to explore further. The group should ask detailed questions to learn as much as possible about the issue. Once the issue is thoroughly understood, each participant should share the process they would follow to solve the problem. This should take from 15 to 30 minutes total. After addressing one issue, please repeat the process with another issue. The person selected to present their issue should complete the following:

- The issue/opportunity is \_\_\_.
- It is important because \_\_\_.
- My goal is \_\_\_.
- Relevant background is \_\_\_.
- The options I have considered are \_\_\_.
- My ideal outcome is \_\_\_.

Group questions should begin with what, why, when, who, or how. Examples are:

- Why do you believe \_\_\_?
- Why is this a big problem?
- How long has this been a problem?
- How have you or others tried to solve this previously?
- What are your short- and long-term goals?
- Can you explain more about \_\_\_?
- Tell us about your \_\_\_.

#### **Shared Experiences:**

- What have you learned about your own issue through this discussion?
- How has this discussion help or not helped how you think about your issue?

**Bottom line:** Wisdom is required to face difficult challenges that have been ignored for too long. Finding the insight to successfully tackle these issues requires hard work. Remember that these challenges developed over time, and it will take time to find the adaptive solution.

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#### Dig Deeper

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##### Want to learn more?

- <sup>(1)</sup>*Book:* [The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World](#) by Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky, published by Harvard Business Press. This is an excellent book.
- *Video:* [Ronald Heifetz - On Leadership](#) speaking at The Brainwaves Video Anthology. Mr. Heifetz founded the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard Kennedy School.
- *Article:* [What It Takes to Lead Through an Era of Exponential Change](#) by Aneel Chima and Ron Gutman, published by Harvard Business Review
- *Article:* [Success Through Adaptive Leadership: Principles To Cultivate](#) by Michael Shribman published in Forbes.com
- *Book:* [Transforming Church: Bringing Out the Good to Get to Great](#) by Kevin Ford. This book is cited by Heifetz in reference 1.
- *Article:* [5 Biggest Challenges Facing Small Businesses Right Now](#) by Emily Heaslip published by U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- *Article:* [5 Business Challenges In 2024 And 1 To Ignore](#) by Bill Conerly published Forbes

##### In review: Interview question summary

As first referenced in Lesson 8-1, below is the full summary of the most consistent answers to the question, “What do you see as the most significant issues that business leaders are ignoring today?”

- *People issues:* dealing with difficult people, shrinking workforce, staff engagement, generational issues, remote work, inability to communicate, immaturity, family dynamics, difficulty in hiring good people, productivity
- *Leadership issues:* lack of delegation, words inconsistent with actions, managing different personalities, inability to change, poor communication, leadership development
- *Business issues:* businesses feel they are irreplaceable, ownership transition, leadership transition, financial performance, political pressure, creating value