



THE FOUR REASONS WHY LEADERSHIP TRAINING DOESN'T WORK

A RECENT STUDY FINDS THAT COMPANIES ARE HIGHLY INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING NEW LEADERS, BUT THEIR INVESTMENT IN TRAINING ISN'T PAYING OFF.

That employee who always delivers her results on time, above expectations, with a fresh perspective – you're going to make her team manager because you know she will be a "leader."

A month goes by and she's struggling. Projects are stagnating, there's confusion among her direct reports and her usually upbeat attitude has now dissolved into a state of constant frustration.

What happened? She seemed perfect for the job – ambitious, detail-oriented, intellectual. Where did you go wrong? You were sure she showed leadership potential.

According to a Boston Consulting Group survey, US companies are spending almost \$14 billion on leadership development every year, but is that money well spent? Corporate decision makers everywhere are rolling their eyes because of course the money is well spent! Developing employees into leaders will benefit you, your employees, and your organization as a whole. Remember, when you build a better workforce, they'll help you build a better business. The correct topic of discussion should be: *Is the money spent well?*

In today's complex business environment, where leadership talent is hard to come by, the desire for a quick fix is easy to understand. BCG found that "improving leadership development" and "managing talent" were top priorities for the companies surveyed, yet the respondents—more than 4,000 senior business leaders from around the world—also ranked these two areas as their greatest weaknesses.

For example, if your business will be going through a growth spurt, you may need additional leaders. What skills do these leaders need to have? Do any of your current employees have the skills – or capability to learn the skills – needed to fulfill these roles?



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“If not, developing a plan to bridge the gap between current employee skill sets and needed skill sets would be of great value,” says Lynne Klein, human resource advisor at Insperity. Developing internal candidates can save you time and money on recruiting, onboarding and training outsiders. “Additionally, creating a career path and demonstrating advancement and promotion opportunities through development can help you retain your top talent,” says Klein.

Every day, the multi-billion-dollar corporate leadership industry pumps out books, trainings and blogs claiming to improve the effectiveness of any leader, based on everyone from Abraham Lincoln to Larry Page.

Armed with a generous budget, HR executives find themselves entrenched in employee leadership classes, programs, apps, trainings, webinars, seminars, the list goes on... So what makes one initiative more successful than the rest? For starters, if it's on the first page of Google – it must be worth looking into. One of the top five results from your Google search? Program GOLD. But for the legitimacy of this piece, it goes without saying, quantitative statistics and results play a vital role in seeing and thus believing in an employee program's overall impact and success.

So no pressure- HR Department – the company's success and future rely heavily on the employees in it. Here's what I would like to know if I were in your position – four reasons why leadership training fails in organization and how they can be improved.

1) Overlooking Context

Getting to know your team is critical for success. On a micro level, imagine a manager who doesn't know which employee is striving for a promotion or why. This can lead to lost opportunities, frustration and turnover.

Organizations continue to throw time and money at improving leadership skills so it makes sense to see an overwhelming number of companies offering a simple solution. Being good at one thing doesn't mean you're good at everything. And yet, too many leadership programs use the same training for all employees, all the time. The assumption that one-size-fits-all doesn't work because the approach needs to be specific to the person and situation at hand.

Programs that are aimed at "broad, generic themes" like success or leadership do not help to develop specific skills. An efficient leadership development program needs to start with the individual employee's specific context. Instead of expecting employees to master a million things at once, they need to focus on the areas that matter most to each of them individually. Once each employee knows what they need to work on personally they can begin the journey to change.

How to Really Customize Leadership Development

There is a question many executives always ask early on, when they consult potential partners for their companies' leadership development initiatives:

“Will it be customized?”

The answer, today, cannot be anything other than a resounding “Yes!” Because “customized” has become a synonym of “good” for leadership development.



Sometimes, however, that question hides a request for subordination. It is a nicer way to ask, “Will you do everything that I demand?” Other times, it is the starting point of a professional collaboration, an invitation to learn and work together.

2) Understanding Behavioral Change

You see the articles, eBooks, and whitepapers all over the internet about improving leadership. The majority of these focus almost exclusively on WHAT behaviors to change to become a better leader, not HOW to change those behaviors. The goal of any leadership development program is to change behavior. After a successful program, participants should show up differently, saying and doing things in new ways that produce better results.

Identifying and understanding the underlying thoughts, feelings, and assumptions in individual employees, as well as the environment that shaped them, is a necessary precondition of behavioral change. This qualification is rarely, if ever, included in employee leadership development programs available today.

3) Commitment to Change

Change within your business is inevitable. What really matters is how your business handles this change. Does it come to a dead stop, or have you put the proper pieces in place to keep it moving? If you have a good succession plan, then you can keep moving. A succession plan ensures that you have employees who are prepared to step up into leadership roles when others leave. While they may not have all the necessary skills or aptitudes yet, with a little training and mentoring, these employees have the potential to help your business thrive.

Being as such, employees are the ones who will either embrace or resist company change. You cannot force George from Accounting to successfully transition to a manager role if he has no desire to. Even if he agrees to the change, his motivation and drive will ultimately prove whether he becomes a successful leader.

At the end of the day, the vision and goals of the company have to align with those of your employees. As an HR professional, it's your responsibility to cultivate a workforce that promotes growth and personal development so that when change happens, your people are in the right mindset and motivated to take it on.

4) Failing to Measure Results

One of the biggest challenges organizations and HR Managers face is how to quantify the value of their investment in leadership development. When companies fail to track and measure changes in leadership performance over time, they increase the odds that improvement initiatives won't be taken seriously.



Too often, any evaluation of leadership development begins with attendance and ends with attendee satisfaction. The problem with this is that trainers cheat the system to favor their written results. Instead of delivering the challenging program your employees need to permanently change, they deliver a simple, more pleasing outline to participants.

The best way to see if a training course was successful is to assess the skills attendees developed. The skills that are most commonly associated with leadership cannot be learnt from reading a book, taking a personality test, or sitting safely in a classroom. People build skills by having to do something, failing, and trying again and again. Just as in any business performance program, once the assessment is complete, participants learn from successes and failures over time and make the necessary adjustments.

You're spending a considerable amount of time and possibly money on helping your employees improve their skills. To get your greatest possible return on investment, your employees need to be able to put those new skills to work in your company. Set up some opportunities where your employees can quickly apply the new skills to the job and get feedback. This will help them reinforce and refine their new skills. If they don't use the new knowledge when it's fresh, they're likely to lose it.

Your company is full of great, potential leaders, but leadership is more than just the influence a "job title" gives you. By revealing the person that is behind the title, recognizing their unique skills, and devoting a program geared toward their unique areas that need improvement, can enable them, and your entire workforce, to increase performance and productivity over time.

If you want to avoid these common mistakes and increase the odds of success with leadership development, it's important to have a strategy in place. The first step in developing a great leader is to balance the individual first, determine what makes that person who they are – their unique characteristics, traits, and the levels of each. Only when the individual is balanced and whole as a person personally and professionally, does a more generalized, universal approach to leadership development become effective.

To learn more on **Trait Skills Development** visit www.dharmalife.info, follow Dharma Life Sciences on [LinkedIn](#), or contact Miranda Maniscalco of Dharma Life Sciences at (646) 771-2145 and miranda.maniscalco@us.dharmalife.info.



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