

BUILDING LEADERS

3 KEYS TO EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP TRAINING



There are a number of things to consider when evaluating the effectiveness of leadership training. But we think these three should gravitate toward the top of your list.

1. THE LEARNER

We all had a class in college that we would have absolutely avoided — if only we had been afforded the opportunity. It was a prerequisite for our major or a requirement for our graduation. We had to take it, so we did. How much have we thought about that learning experience since? Not a bit! We checked the box that needed checking and we moved on.

How many people attend leadership training in a similar frame of mind? “I don’t need this.” “I don’t think this is going to help me in any way.” “Career-wise, I’m not sure I want to move into a formal leadership position,” etc.

WHAT’S CHANGED? PLENTY. BUT MOSTLY THE LEARNERS THEMSELVES.

We spend so much time and effort trying to determine the return on investment of leadership training. Most of that toil is focused on the experience itself in long-term combination with the change in behavior it produces (and the business results those changes generate). Moving forward, we need to focus increased attention on the learner.

Do they aspire to be better leaders, and do they see themselves being successful in that pursuit? Because if they do not, it simply doesn’t matter how awesome our offering happens to be.

2. THE TRAINING

It is difficult to imagine training of any kind producing documented results if the training itself isn’t compelling. Two parameters of evaluation have long been critical in that regard:

- Is it relevant?
- Is it engaging?

The driving forces of this assessment have shifted (and continue to do so). Traditionally, the platform skills of the facilitator were overwhelmingly the most critical consideration. Other elements contributed, of course, but in an event-centric design, metrics were (and still are) a function of the facilitator’s ability.

What’s changed? Plenty. But mostly the learners themselves. The modern learner is spread thin to meet the everyday challenges of their work. For a variety of different reasons, they work in a flexible, hybrid environment and the pace of change has served to redefine “upskilling” and “reskilling” as “the new normal.”


What are the implications? First and foremost, training needs to fit into the flow of that work. Content should be consumed in “bite-sized” chunks and tied to application. Relevancy has taken on an entirely different meaning. With ever-increasing regularity,

learners expect content to be directly tied to their work. As such, leadership training is much less about imparting knowledge, and increasingly about a function of embedding hands-on experience (with feedback and feedforward) into the design.

3. THE CONNECTIONS

Think for a quick moment about key executives in your organization. The leaders who drive your culture. Do they believe the way you are developing leaders provides a competitive advantage? Or do they see leadership training as the kind of thing that has to be done, but it makes no discernible impact on the profitability or competitiveness of your company?

How about the managers of the trainees who attend your leadership training? Do they understand and appreciate the critical role they play when it comes time to evaluate leadership training’s true impact? The more connected those managers are to the training itself, the higher the probability that training will be proactively positioned and pulled through upon completion.

Connecting what you do in training to the calculated interests of executive leaders, as well as the outcome achievement interests of mid-level managers, is a crucial component of an effective evaluation strategy. 

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