

# 7 Best Practices for Successfully Developing Leaders in Your Organization



## **The Current Environment**

A recent statistic by Bersin by Deloitte estimate that \$15.5 Billion is spent year on leadership development in the United States alone. However, the vast majority of this investment is wasted. Most leadership programs go as follows:

A CEO or business unit President tells human resources or training and development that the team is struggling with a particular leadership skill. Training professionals build programs and/or source the best content partner based on modality and cost. Project champions are assigned and business leaders, maybe even the CEO, get on board and deployment begins. Two months later, the team realizes the results are not what was expected. There were some positive takeaways in the form of smile sheets or encouraging feedback, but the leadership skill gap still exists. There your organization is, months later in your next training program, trying to close leadership skill gaps the same way. It was Albert Einstein who defined insanity as doing the same thing over again and expecting different results. Fear not because you are not the only one who has completed this circle of insanity.

We experienced the same challenge in our business when we launched a training course. Riding the wave of elective online learning courses, six thousand professionals eagerly signed up to take the online leadership development microlearning course. Everyone on the team was beaming with excitement, eagerly ready to document engagement. Then, reality hit and our hopes came crashing down. Less than 5 percent of professionals who enrolled completed the exercises and finished the course. Whether the course was elective or directive, the numbers were not even close to acceptable for any organization. With the wind knocked out of our sails, we realized there had to be a better way.

## **An Alternative Approach**

A common practice for Marine officers is to put together what they refer to as an "Iron Council." This group consists of five or six direct reports and peers of an officer. A few times a year, the Iron Council meets with their officer in a group setting to provide feedback about the leader's performance. The feedback is not meant to make the officer feel poorly about their performance or to promote a forum to air petty grievances.

Something amazing happens after these Iron Council meetings. While feedback can be tough for most to hear, these officers find themselves on a mission. They take the opportunity to increase self-awareness of their leadership performance and identify specific things they can do to improve. When provided with further formal leadership development opportunities, the officers are engaged and take ownership of their education.

The practice of the Iron Council got us thinking. Why don't organizations use this practice to develop leaders?

We had to test out the idea. Instead of launching another generic leadership development program, we started with the core of the skill. In other words, what was the most important thing for a leader to do. Turns out the most important thing for a leader to do is to elevate others. Once he had the core of the skill, we then deployed our EO Leadership 360° Assessment. The assessment was geared toward the manager's demonstration of the core skill.

The report exposed a manager's strengths and weaknesses in 16 core leadership competencies as rated by their direct reports. We compiled the results into a personalized leader profile report and delivered it to the manager via a 30-minute one-on-one call. During the call, we discussed the results and the potential why behind them. The coaching session along with the report put a mirror in front of them so they could objectively see how they were doing, just like the Iron Council in the Marines.

Afterwards, they were prescribed one microlearning module a month to address their weakest competencies. What happened next was interesting: The engagement and completion percentages of learning content shot through the roof. Regardless of whether the organization preferred directive over elective training, instructor-led training over virtual, two-hour modules over microlearning, or PowerPoint over video, we saw monthly completion percentages jump to the **85 to 95 percent range**. If you are interested in seeing similar results ensure your leadership development programs follow these best practices.

# Best Practices to Help Improve the Leadership Development Programs in Your Company

Here are 7 best practices we use with our partners to help them create successful leadership development programs:

## 1. Start at the top

The content space in 2019 is a race for attention. That means Training and Development or Human Resources in any organization must become a marketing department as much as a content producer. One of the best ways to get attention is to get Executive Sponsorship. If your leadership development initiative is not coming from the top, you must get as much sponsorship as possible.



There are many ways to get sponsorship in the organization but at the end of the day it comes down to relationships and garnering support from those relationships. This can be increasingly difficult in organizations with poor executive leaders or a toxic culture but whoever is responsible for the leadership development initiatives must do their best to get as much support as humanly possible.

## 2. Define leadership

There are over 30,000 definitions of leadership on the internet. We have come to define leadership this way:

“Someone whose actions inspire, empower, and serve in order to elevate others over an extended period of time.”

While this is how we have defined leadership, your organization's definition could be different yet related to elevating others.

This is often the biggest eye opening best practice for our partners. Company leaders have often defined their core values and their mission statements but rarely have they defined what it means to be a leader. Use a company like LearnLoft to help you or put together a committee and work to come to a consensus about what it means to be a leader in your organization. Go ahead and get your hands dirty!

### **3. Focus on frontline managers**

The vast majority of companies invest in leadership development at their highest level because the salary cost of those employees substantiate the investment. Based on our experience working with companies of all sizes, this is the wrong approach.

Men and women in the C-Suite are typically good at their job and already take their leadership development education seriously. The biggest impact any company can make is not in the C-Suite, but with frontline managers. Why? Because they have a direct connection to the employee base who touches the customer the most.

These frontline managers often are thirsty and eager to learn more about leadership and develop their skills because it's never been provided to them.

### **4. Empower self-awareness**

Assessments with thought-provoking questions are a great place to begin to improve self-awareness because self-awareness is the gift that keeps on giving. Too often managers have a distorted view of how well they are actually doing in their job. Provide your managers with a way to increase their self-awareness through a 360° assessment and report. These assessments are a powerful way to get direct reports, peers or even bosses to provide feedback on the manager.

|                      |                       |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Love</i>          | <i>Discipline</i>     |
| <b>Recognition</b>   | <b>Standards</b>      |
| <b>Personability</b> | <b>Coach</b>          |
| <b>Development</b>   | <b>Goals</b>          |
| <b>Unity</b>         | <b>Model</b>          |
| <b>Positivity</b>    | <b>Consistency</b>    |
| <b>Vulnerability</b> | <b>Accountability</b> |
| <b>Empathy</b>       | <b>Priority</b>       |
| <b>Trust</b>         | <b>Vision</b>         |

The table to the left contains the 16 core leadership competencies LearnLoft measures in our Leader 360° assessment.

Assessments identifying strengths and weaknesses are merely the first step to improving self-awareness. Revealing the results is where the real shift begins to happen. If you can make delivering results an empowering experience, your learners will open themselves up to receiving it. These experiences could come in the form of one-on-one coaching, group discussions or an instructor-led or virtual session.

## 5. Provide content to close the gap

Take into account that individuals will have varying degrees of proficiency in any given skill. A clear leadership curriculum is proving to be the most effective for organizations. If you are thinking of implementing a similar initiative, you can first put all front-line managers through an initial training session in person or virtually depending on what works best in your organization. Next, push one assigned continuous microlearning module a month. Learners are able to feel empowered to close their skill gaps. This creates an equal opportunity to learn what the organization considers "good looks like" in terms of performance or proficiency.



Most people who are responsible for leadership development programs in their organizations spend the vast majority of their time on this step. Providing engaging and impactful content can make or break any program. LearnLoft follows a simple rule, "Less is more and do not be afraid to stretch people." I hope you will steal this.

## **6. Coach for continuous development**

While learning takes place in a classroom, the real impact is made when leaders take what they've learned and apply it everyday. As we all know, the further away from a training event we move, the harder it is to recall and apply critical leadership concepts. That's why we offer coaching (both group and one-on-one) to help leaders tackle their individual and potentially unique challenges. Along with online reinforcement to close the gap, coaching creates next-level accountability and ensures an organization's investment in training is protected over time. With Figure out what works for the learning culture in your organization then take it 10% further every year.

## **7. Measure impact**

Smile sheets and participant satisfaction scores are no longer enough. Get in a habit of measuring and remeasuring on an ongoing basis. This will help you to not only see the impact but give you the chance to adjust and modify. This could mean sending out a culture survey every year or reassessing leaders on an annual basis. The key is that you are measuring the impact of not only the organization but the lives of the people within it.

The goal of a leadership training initiative should be to create more great leaders. It's our hope you have already applied these 7 best practices to your leadership development programs and if you haven't you will add the ones that are missing.

# How We Deploy Leadership Development Programs

| CALCULATE  | LEARN   | DEVELOP  |
|--|---|--|
| 360° Assessment<br>Personalized Leader Report<br>One-On-One Report Review Call | In-Person Instructor Led Training<br>or<br>Virtual Instruction Led Training | Microlearning Reinforcement Online<br>Coaching (Group or One-On-One) |

*If you want to learn more about how LearnLoft helps organizations turn managers into leaders and create healthier places to work reach out to [sales@learnloft.com](mailto:sales@learnloft.com) or go to [learnloft.com](http://learnloft.com) to speak so one of our leadership experts.*