

MARCH 2022

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talent development

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT MUST-HAVES

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will lead to effective
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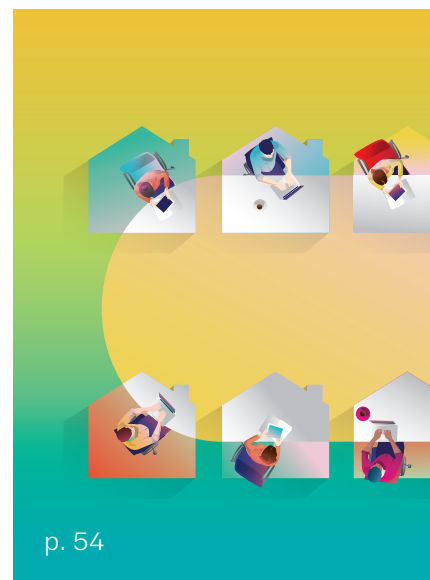
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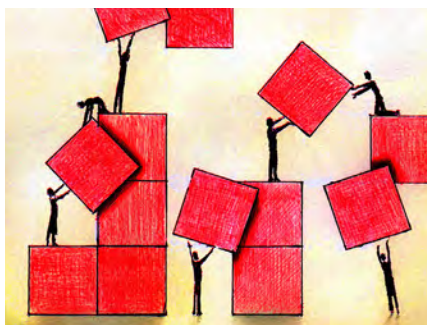
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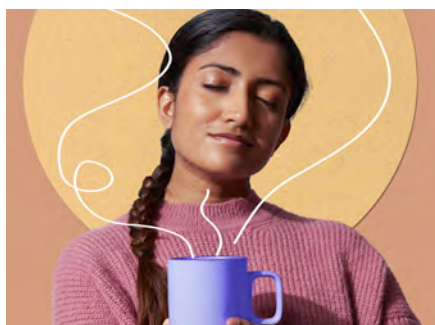
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TD (ISSN 2374-0663 print; ISSN 2374-0671 online) is published by the Association for Talent Development (ATD) monthly plus a special edition issue. Principal office: 1640 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314; 703.683.8100. Association members receive this publication as part of their membership dues. Nonmember individual subscriptions to US addresses, \$150 per year. Foreign individual subscriptions, \$249 per year. Institutional rate to US addresses, \$331 per year. Foreign institutional rates, \$430 per year. Claims for replacement of subscription issues not received must be made within 90 days of the issue date. Back issues are available for purchase for US\$19.50 each, postpaid. Rates subject to change without notice. USPS #636800. Preferred Periodicals postage paid at Alexandria, Virginia, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to TD, ATD Customer Care Center, 1640 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314.

Publications Mail Agreement #40030826
Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:
P.O. Box 1051, Fort Erie, ON L2A 6C7
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2021 Bronze EXCEL Award, Magazine General Excellence

2021 Bronze EXCEL Award, Feature Article Design, "Pivot and Adapt," September 2020

2020 Gold EXCEL Award, Mobile Application, ATD Publications App

2020 Gold EXCEL Award, Feature Article Design, "Riding the VUCA Wave," September 2019

2020 Bronze EXCEL Award, Feature Article Design, "Avoid Becoming a Thing of the Past," December 2019

2019 Bronze EXCEL Award, Mobile Application (Magazine)

2018 Silver ASBPE Award, Design Excellence

2018 Silver ASBPE Award, Illustration, "The Learning Myths That Plague Us," July 2018

2018 Bronze ASBPE Award, Feature Article Design, "The Mess of Discussion and the Magic of Dialogue," January 2018

2017 Silver EXCEL Award, Mobile Application (Magazine)

Winner, 2016 Ozzie Digital Award, Association/Non-Profit App, TD magazine

2016 Gold EXCEL Award, Mobile Application (Magazine)

Honorable Mention, 2015 Ozzie Award, Best App, Association/Non-Profit, TD App

2015 Bronze EXCEL Award, Mobile Application (Magazine), TD App

Honorable Mention, 2014 Ozzie Award, Overall Design, Association/Non-Profit, February 2014 issue



“Ongoing leadership development is required.”

PHOTO | BEY BELLO

Willing, but Are They Ready?

When I first got promoted to my current position, I had 15 years of magazine experience, and more specifically, I had been managing editor of *TD* magazine for more than six years. That experience made me confident that I could effectively do the technical aspects of the new role. However, my biggest concern about the position was becoming a manager for the first time.

So, off I went to management training. That helped me gain the skills I needed to feel more comfortable with the role. Of course, becoming a successful manager doesn't happen as a result of a one-time training event. Ongoing leadership development is required.

What factors make an effective leadership development program? Read this month's cover story for insights. In it, authors Joelle K. Jay and Raluca Graebner compare two organizations to illustrate how their respective approaches to leadership development led to contrasting outcomes. While one company integrated what the authors call the five must-haves, the other company did not. Guess which organization had the better results.

Employers that offer proper management training to technical-experts-turned-managers likewise will experience better results. As I've admitted, my career as an editor did not automatically mean I would be a successful manager. Sure, I had a proven record of effectively managing projects, but managing people was an entirely new responsibility.

"Companies need a clear leadership development path that starts with supporting their expert individual performers in developing their people-leadership abilities to build a strong foundation for future leadership roles," writes Corina Walsh in her article. She describes the different ways that employers can help high performers during their transition to different levels of management.

Moral of the story? Don't throw employees into the deep end without adequate preparation. Robust leadership development solutions will help those workers thrive.

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68%

of employers are optimistic about internal mobility opportunities compared to 43 percent of employees. ►

TREND WATCH

Employers and Employees Differ in Their Outlooks

Employers are more optimistic about the economy, internal mobility, and skilling opportunities.

BY JOY METCALF

From the pandemic to economic fluctuations, there have been a lot of challenges for both companies and workers recently. During this tumultuous time, the quarterly Randstad RiseSmart *Career Mobility Outlook* reports have been tracking employers' (based on HR professionals' responses) and employees' observations on workplace matters, including the economy, internal career growth and progression, recruitment trends, and skilling. As detailed in the third quarter 2021 report, while employers and employees shared some similar perspectives, particularly related to worker readiness to support business goals, workers had dimmer outlooks overall.

Economy. Employers were more optimistic than employees about the economy. By Q3, about half of employers continued to have a positive outlook. The report

notes that those with larger workforces had more confidence that they could overcome challenges with the resources they have. Yet nearly two-thirds of workers had a pessimistic outlook. "It is clear that employees feel the brunt of various economic issues and are more insecure about their futures," the researchers call out.

Hiring and internal mobility. Most companies in Q3 anticipated hiring and planned to turn to internal hires to fill those positions. Likewise, the majority of employers said their managers are open to internal mobility. The report notes that this is an ideal way to retain talent and a means for companies to move forward with plans considering the current labor market.

In the first half of 2021, half of employees were confident that internal job opportunities were available, and up-

wards of 60 percent in Q2 considered their managers open to such job shifts. But researchers identified that the economic changes in Q3 dampened employees' outlooks. Only about four in 10 retained their confidence in internal mobility; around the same number were confident in manager support.

Skilled and ready. Employers and workers align more in their outlooks about having the right skills to meet organizational objectives. According to the report, three-quarters of employers said their workers are skilled to tackle business challenges. Nearly the same amount of employees agreed they are prepared to achieve business goals.

Skilling opportunities. Despite the outlook alignment on preparedness, employees are far more pessimistic about the availability of career development opportunities within their companies. About three out of four employers said they are offering skilling and career development, but only half of employees agreed.

Joy Metcalf is managing editor of *TD* and *CTDO* magazines and *TD at Work*; jmetcalf@td.org.



BONUS
APP CONTENT

FAST FACT

But First, Cybersecurity Training

82% of IT leaders in the UK say new hires should complete cybersecurity training before they start working.

SOURCE: 2021 UK CYBERSECURITY CENSUS REPORT, KEEPER



NOW YOU KNOW

Wow WITH ONBOARDING

Implementation specialists and L&D professionals share a common goal of making memorable training.

BY DERRICK THOMPSON

Many consumer goods today include a link to a video or online content to orient users to the product or service. That is a means to onboard customers. Onboarding could include setting up, configuring, and customizing the product; offering solutions or training; or answering questions.

According to customer onboarding platform Rocketlane's The State of Customer Onboarding 2022 survey, "The customer onboarding phase is your customer's first brush with your product and brand. This is also the phase where your relationship with them takes on a collaborative nature. Customer onboarding sets your customer up to derive value from your product."

Onboarding or implementation professionals, like L&D professionals, are in the business of knowledge transfer. For them, knowledge transfer is tied to sales. To retain customers, Rocketlane notes that customers "need to have their 'wow' moments through their first

brush with the product and after that too. The onboarding experience should encourage feature adoption and make upselling easier."

Similarly, organizations benefit greatly when onboarding is memorable for employees. According to the *Getting the Best on Board* report from the online assessment platform Questionmark, "What happens in a worker's earliest days with their employer can set the tone for their entire tenure."

"Only 12% of U.S. employees say their company does a good job of onboarding," according to the Gallup article "8 Practical Tips for Leaders for a Better Onboarding

Process." On the flip side, Gallup reports that those who had outstanding onboarding experiences defined their position as "the best possible job."

To develop memorable and effective onboarding, Gallup recommends fostering relationships, incorporating learning and involving new hires' managers, and creating an easy and intuitive process. Other tips include finding creative ways for staff to make connections, sending new hires a welcome package, and incorporating experiences that introduce new employees to the company culture.

Getting the Best on Board warns that "When employers fail to get onboarding right, they pay the price with higher turnover, lower morale and additional recruitment costs." Invest in meaningful and memorable onboarding experiences to retain talent and set them up for success.

Derrick Thompson is a former writer/editor for ATD.

3 out of 10

new hires say they feel prepared and supported to excel in their role after their onboarding experience.

Disengaged Employees Are Flight Risks

Workers want growth, flexibility, and communication.

Departures

REASONS EMPLOYEES LEAVE

STATUS

POOR LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION	BOARDING
LACK OF EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION	BOARDING
LACK OF CAREER GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT	BOARDING
INSUFFICIENT WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND FLEXIBILITY	BOARDING
INADEQUATE EMPLOYEE AND LEADERSHIP FEEDBACK	BOARDING
LACK OF COMPETITIVE BENEFITS	BOARDING

Employees who agree they will be at their job in one year:

are highly engaged

are disengaged

88%

49%

9 OUT OF 10

employees believe exit surveys will help improve current workers' experience.

**MORE
THAN
HALF**

of employees are confident they can find a job as good as and that pays as much as their current role.

SOURCE: 2021 EMPLOYEE TURNOVER TRENDS: RETAINING TALENT IN A NEW WORLD OF WORK, QUANTUM WORKPLACE



Factor Personalities Into Return-to-Office Plans

Introverted individuals may find full-time in-office work counterproductive.

BY DERRICK THOMPSON

The past two years have been an experiment in rethinking the workplace. For some, particularly introverts, the shift to working remotely was desirable. As companies move forward with return-to-office and hybrid work plans, the Myers-Briggs Company encourages leaders to support introverted employees and advises introverted employees to speak up about where they work best.

A late 2021 Myers-Briggs blog post points out that more than half of peo-

ple in the world have a preference for introversion. What that means, though, could be misunderstood, says Myers-Briggs senior consultant Michael Segovia. In the blog post, he notes that “On the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Extroversion and Introversion are defined in terms of how we like or prefer to direct and receive energy.” He further explains that introverts gain energy from being able to concentrate, whereas extroverts gain their energy from interactions.

How does that relate to return-to-office plans? The Myers-Briggs Company contends that people can’t perform well or succeed if they can’t be their true selves in the workplace. The company’s “Introversion 2.0: Reshaping the Way We Work” tip sheet offers nine ways to help both managers and introverted workers feel good about returning to the office.

Among them is people leaders being skilled at listening with empathy and understanding which employees work best from home. “Flexibility and exper-

imentation is key. Don't force the same model on everyone." According to Myers-Briggs research, introverts have elevated concerns about returning to the office, in part because of the distracting environment. That's where leaders can listen and demonstrate support.

"If they say they need easier access to quiet time, for example, take it seriously," the tip sheet advises. "This is how you help your employees stay engaged with their role—and your organization." If working from home isn't an option, leaders should seek introverts' input for ideas on where to include quiet spaces in the office floor plan.

Additionally, Myers-Briggs experts highlight the importance of people leaders being aware of their biases. According to the tip sheet, "Leaders tend to be people who prefer Extraversion." Leaders can mitigate that bias with self-awareness training.

The Myers-Briggs Company likewise encourages introverted employees to own their preferences and speak up about what they need. "Don't apologize for who you are and don't be embarrassed to ask for help," Segovia adds.

Derrick Thompson is a former writer/editor for ATD.

**4.4
billion**

individuals around
the world are
introverts.

INNOVATIONS

Culinary Training, Job Placement Baked Into One Program

Training and job placement are part of the recipe that Westerly Education Center and Johnson & Wales University in Rhode Island are using to generate more qualified workers for the food service industry. The 12-week training program involves classroom and hands-on, in-restaurant instruction, covering such topics as cooking methods, knife cutting, nutrition, and food safety. Following the course, participants will qualify to take two industry food safety and allergen exams. The program also offers job placement services.

"This workforce training program not only helps people with a passion for food skill up, get credentialed, and land great jobs, it's a program that will help restaurants in the tourism-reliant southern part of the state employ qualified workers," says Amy Grzybowski, executive director of the Westerly Education Center.

Partnering with Westerly and Johnson & Wales for this program are Royce Associates and nine restaurants that have committed to offering internships and employment to the adult learners. The Rhode Island-based program is free to participants, thanks to grant support.

"After the first two weeks of instruction, students will benefit from in-restaurant training so they can practice what they are learning in a real-world setting with professional supervision," explains Thomas J. Delle Donne, assistant dean of Johnson & Wales University's College of Food Innovation & Technology. "Importantly, students will also be paid for their work while they learn, so this is an ideal training program for an adult who cannot put life on hold for 12 weeks while earning a postsecondary credential needed for work."

WORD WIZ

Nappuccino

There's a right time for everything—including napping on the job. In his book *When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing*, Daniel Pink reveals the formula for taking the perfect nap, what he calls a *nappuccino*.

First, chart the times of day when your energy plummets. Do that for a week to discover your ideal nap time. Then unplug, isolate yourself from sound and light, chug some coffee, and enter dreamland for 25 minutes and no longer. Napping for more than 30 minutes leads to sleep inertia, whereas, Pink points out, shorter naps offer the benefits of increased mental function and alertness.

Nonprofits Are Prioritizing Talent Management in 2022

Culture and engagement, L&D, and performance management will take precedence.

BY DERRICK THOMPSON

News about talent wars, skill shortages, and retention challenges are of concern to all organizations—including nonprofits. So how do employers plan to tackle those struggles in the year ahead?

Nonprofit HR asked more than 400 US nonprofits representing more than 20 different focus areas, ranging from food distribution to housing to supporting youths from marginalized communities, about their 2022 priorities. According to the resulting *2022 Nonprofit Talent Management Priorities Survey* report, respondents' top three focus areas are culture and engagement, L&D, and performance management. Nonprofits are also prioritizing talent acquisition this

73%
of nonprofits have a
dedicated HR or talent
development team.

year, including attracting and hiring diverse talent, strengthening the company brand, and improving internal interview skills and practices.

While the majority of respondents have a dedicated HR or talent development team, only one-quarter said they currently have a formal talent management strategy or plan. Still, nearly eight out of 10 are focusing on L&D, with more than half

concentrating primarily on developing an L&D program or strategy. Launching a diversity, equity, and inclusion training program and increasing investments to develop and strengthen teams are two additional high priorities for the responding nonprofits.

Further, more than one-third of respondents plan to prioritize talent-focused technologies. One survey respondent noted, "We have tools, but need to understand/leverage functionality." More than half will implement a learning management technology system, while two-thirds plan to expand their use of talent acquisition technology, such as an applicant tracking system.

Respondents reported that a lack of staffing and financial resources dedicated to HR are obstacles to them achieving their talent management goals. Most nonprofits also identified that they've adjusted their talent management priorities because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Much of our engagement and culture strategy will revolve around change management due to downsizing our office and a new 'work from home first' plan," one respondent said. "Finding ways to keep people engaged with each other and with the agency while working mostly remote—this time, permanently. Not everyone thrived while working from home during the pandemic, so it's going to be very interesting to see how people do with this."

Derrick Thompson is a former writer/editor for ATD.

 **BONUS
APP CONTENT**

COOL TOOL

Teleprompter Mirror

In today's age of online learning, talent development professionals are often producing videos. That may mean being responsible for staging the video, writing the script, and potentially being the on-screen talent. If drama or journalism wasn't your elective of choice in college, you may worry about messing up your lines and delivery.

Teleprompter Mirror can help ease that stress. The free, web-based app empowers users to flawlessly deliver lines. Unlike many free resources, you don't need to sign up or

create an account to access the app's robust and dynamic features. You can customize the font, font size, and background colors.

The teleprompter enables you to manually advance lines as you present. For a professional feel, give permission for the site to listen as you present, and the site's voice-activated scrolling feature will advance lines at the rate of your delivery. Go to the Teleprompter Mirror's site, paste in your script, and you're good to go.

OFF THE WIRE

Leadership by Design

Regardless of whether you have direct reports or the organizational chart classifies you as part of the senior leadership team, this podcast from Herman Miller Global Talent Management covers items of interest that are applicable to talent development practitioners of all levels.

Heather Esposito, senior manager of global leadership development at Herman Miller Group, hosts the podcast, which specifically explores leadership skills and roles in effect throughout her company. However, TD leaders may find much of the content inspiring and enlightening. Think about it—what workplace issue does not in some way involve leadership? That's why it behooves TD professionals to be conversant in the topics discussed in this forum.

Some of the episodes that solidify leadership's overlap into the TD realm include "Our Guiding Principles for Leadership Development," "Unlock Potential: Readiness for the Future Demands Development Today," and "The Intersection of Coaching and Change: Conversations that Make a Difference."

PRACTICAL POINTERS

Invigorate Your Career

Don't be afraid to step out and pursue new job opportunities.

Are you disconnected from your work? Feel like your job is taking a toll on your personal life? Those are two signs that a career change is in order, according to the Northeastern University Graduate Programs article "6 Signs It's Time to Change Jobs." Or maybe you've been in your current role for many years or you are re-entering work and don't know where to begin. In "Take Charge of Your Career Path," Lisa Spinelli highlights how job searching and interviewing have changed in recent years and how you can pursue the career you really want.

First determine how you want to spend your time. Then you can approach your job search using an outbound or inbound method—or a combination of the two.

Outbound job searching, often considered a traditional approach, involves searching job boards for open positions and applying. It can also involve solving a problem for a company for which you want to work. Research a pain point the organization is trying to solve and offer the employer a remedy for free. Doing so showcases your skills and how you could be an asset to the company.

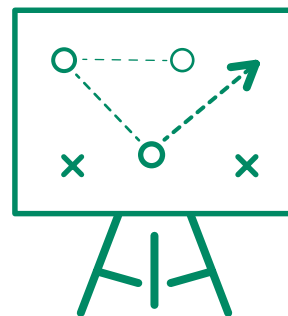
With the inbound method, you attract an employer and job offer without actively applying for a role. You position yourself as a thought leader in the field, either in your current field or in one you aspire to, by writing articles or sharing and commenting on others' postings, for example.



MORE ONLINE

These tips were adapted from the March 2022 issue of *TD at Work*. Learn more at td.org/TDatWork.

4 out of 10
learning teams need a plan
to innovate learning.



Strategically Prepare to Transform Business With Learning

Within the next three years, the types of learners and the experiences they want will expand.

BY PATTY GAUL

CEOs are increasingly learning the value of talent and upskilling for the business's future, and they are inviting talent development leaders to be part of strategic conversations. To effectively take part, TD professionals need to understand what's needed for the future and come prepared with ideas to propose.

For the report *The Evolving Role of Learning in Workforce Transformation: How the CLO Will Drive Business Growth*, GP Strategies in partnership with Future Workplace examined upskilling trends and surveyed business and learning leaders from around the world and across industries and generations.

The report suggests that by 2025, employees won't be the only learners. Learning and business leaders expect artificial intelligence bots, gig workers, and customers to be part of the learning audience. The report also states that learners will want more dynamic, high-tech learning experiences, akin to what they have via smartphones, home digital assistants, and AI bots.

Further, they'll want their learning personalized—think Apple music playlists for customized learning. Talent developers are acting accordingly. By 2025, 40 percent of learning teams plan to pursue virtual reality, nearly four in 10 expect to use AI, and more than one-third will expand mobile access to training.

Learners' expectations are increasing pressure on the L&D function, which faced many challenges in 2021, including upskilling themselves, creating

a plan to innovate learning, and developing a lifelong learning culture.

So, what kinds of upskilling are most pressing for L&D professionals? The top in-demand capability needed by 2025 is business acumen, followed by data analytics. Next in priority are a growth mindset, technology acumen, and internal marketing.

The report recommends that L&D professionals take several actions to further business transformation through learning, among them mapping the learning strategy to business transformation readiness and addressing the technology acumen gap within the learning function. "As the technology landscape continues to accelerate, there are a number of new learning capabilities and job roles that need to be created to meet the needs of workforce transformation." Consider new positions such as a digital marketing leader, continuous learning leader, remote work coach, and transformation leader.

Additionally, the report poses several questions L&D practitioners can reflect upon, including: Do you have a defined brand for the learning function? Are you proactively partnering with IT and HR to determine the tools to support the organization? Are you on the lookout for new or changing skills? And are you creating new roles to support learners in the new learning environment?

Patty Gaul is a senior writer/editor for ATD; pgaul@td.org.



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Use a Wiki to Engage Learners and Build Content

This low-cost, high-impact tool can aid with knowledge management.

BY MARGIE MEACHAM

The pandemic has changed the way we work and learn, and the learning technology industry has responded quickly with new tools for collaboration. Platforms such as Zoom and Webex have proved useful for keeping organizations moving, but relying on them to deliver hours and hours of training has been problematic for learners and trainers alike. To address those concerns, many of us in the talent development space are looking to enhance a virtual or blended experience with innovative technologies. But before you invest in something new and shiny, consider using what you already have in new ways to create a more engaging, blended experience. One of those options is a wiki.

A wiki is an online publication that its users write and manage. While not the first wiki ever, Wikipedia is certainly the most well-known and the first one many people experienced as users. As e-learning coach Connie Malamed writes in “Using Wikis for Learning and Collaboration,” wikis can be a vital part of your learning toolbox.

Foster collaboration. To capitalize on a wiki, learners must work together to create and update the files they publish online. The files could be job aids, videos, or any other type of content that supports a particular role or learning program.

Build community. The process of developing and updating a wiki helps form connections within the learning audience. At a time when many people are working remotely, this virtual community can help employees feel connected and supported.

Provide knowledge management clarity. When used to its potential, the wiki becomes an important source of information for users and may help streamline how they consume the content. For example, instead of teaching new hires to search in multiple places for the information they need to get up to speed on the organization’s processes, mission, and values, you could post everything that new employees need in an onboarding wiki.

Support diversity and inclusion. Asynchronous collaboration removes global time zone bias and includes a wide variety of work and communication styles, thus promoting a more inclusive culture.

Demonstrate a growth mindset. A wiki is never finished because users can update it at any time. That practice is a powerful example of a growth mindset, which may lead to learning benefits well beyond those of the wiki itself.

Create social engagement. An active wiki looks a lot like a Facebook page or Twitter feed, which is a format with which many learners are already familiar. Wikis also expand opportunities for engagement in any blended learning experience.

Limited development time. Once the wiki is set up, most organizations find that users can take care of most updates on the site, saving time for the talent development team and limited training resources.

Employee Benefits

Staff can showcase their knowledge by being active participants in the wiki. Further, it is available at their fingertips, providing answers to their work questions in the moment of need.

L&D Advantages

L&D professionals save time as peers learn from each other. Additionally, L&D and talent developers more broadly can see emerging leaders from their wiki contributions.

Organizational Wins

Wikis can institutionalize knowledge sharing, capturing best practices in a way that is easily sharable.

While wikis can be fairly simple to build and support, there are several best practices to keep in mind.

Your first task is finding a location to house the wiki. One of the most exciting things about most wikis is that they can operate on technology you're already using, such as a SharePoint site or a discussion board on your organization's intranet.

Another early consideration is that of selecting a moderator. Although user-generated content is the core benefit of wikis, most companies will want to assign one or more moderators. They should be individuals with the experience and knowledge to edit or correct posts as necessary to ensure that users are getting accurate and up-to-date information.

Note that wikis require some initial legwork. You can't expect learners to be able to create something out of nothing. Organize core content to get things rolling. Develop the wiki with the basic material you're already us-

SOLUTION

Introduce a wiki to extend the learning experience outside of the virtual classroom and make it social.

ing in other ways. Do you have class schedules, job aids, or welcome videos sitting in various places on your intranet? Pull them together in a single place and start an onboarding wiki. Your content will grow over time, but it's important to first show your users what is possible.

As with many other L&D initiatives, finding a sponsor will help propel the initiative forward. Enlist the support of one or more senior leaders to help promote the wiki. Leaders can refer to it in meetings, newsletters, and email messages. They can also post to it when they have information to share. When users see that their leaders are engaged with the wiki, they are much more likely to use it themselves.

To generate learner interest, consider actively stimulating the conversation—that is, encourage participation by posting challenging questions on a regular basis. Also, welcome new users and recognize frequent contributors.

Wikis are a social endeavor, so enable group awareness tools,

such as likes, shares, and alerts. Talk to your IT team to enable as many of those tools as possible to amplify the value of the wiki as a learning experience. Peer ratings, similar to the star assessments on Amazon and other online retailers, send a quick signal that one author or article may be more valuable than others. Ratings can also spur a healthy competition as authors work hard to upgrade their content to gain more likes. If that all sounds familiar, it should. The stimulation people get from their social media accounts is the same motivational response that will help them continue to deliver exactly what you want to see in users engaging with the wiki.

As you continue to use the wiki, you'll want to actively promote it. Let people know about the wiki, teach them how to use it, and continue to raise awareness over time. If you want the wiki to be a sustaining part of your L&D toolbox, you must continue to nurture its use and add content on a regular basis.

As learning professionals, we're not just about likes—we're about learning, retention, and behavior change. You should be able to reap several measurable results from your wiki.

Spend less time in Zoom sessions. Both learners and trainers will appreciate a break from Zoom sessions to go over information that is available in the wiki. The flexibility of being able to access the site at their convenience can help employees regain their feelings

of autonomy and empowerment and improve productivity.

Avoid buying another collaboration tool. Because most organizations already have technology that will support this approach, L&D teams can save their money for a more strategic investment.

Improve engagement. Once workers become active on a wiki, you should see overall employee engagement improve. They may also become more productive and efficient by finding the information they need quickly.

RESULTS

According to knowledge base software provider Helpjuice, failure to share knowledge costs Fortune 500 companies \$31.5 billion a year in losses.

A wiki is a straightforward way to increase learner engagement and introduce variety into your instructional design. Blended with other technologies in your toolbox, it can improve the overall learner experience and save you time and money.

Margie Meacham, "The Brain Lady," is a scholar-practitioner in the field of education and learning and chief freedom officer of LearningToGo; [linkedin.com/in/margiemeacham](https://www.linkedin.com/in/margiemeacham).

The Necessary Shifts for the New L&D Landscape

Start with moving beyond skills development to building capabilities.

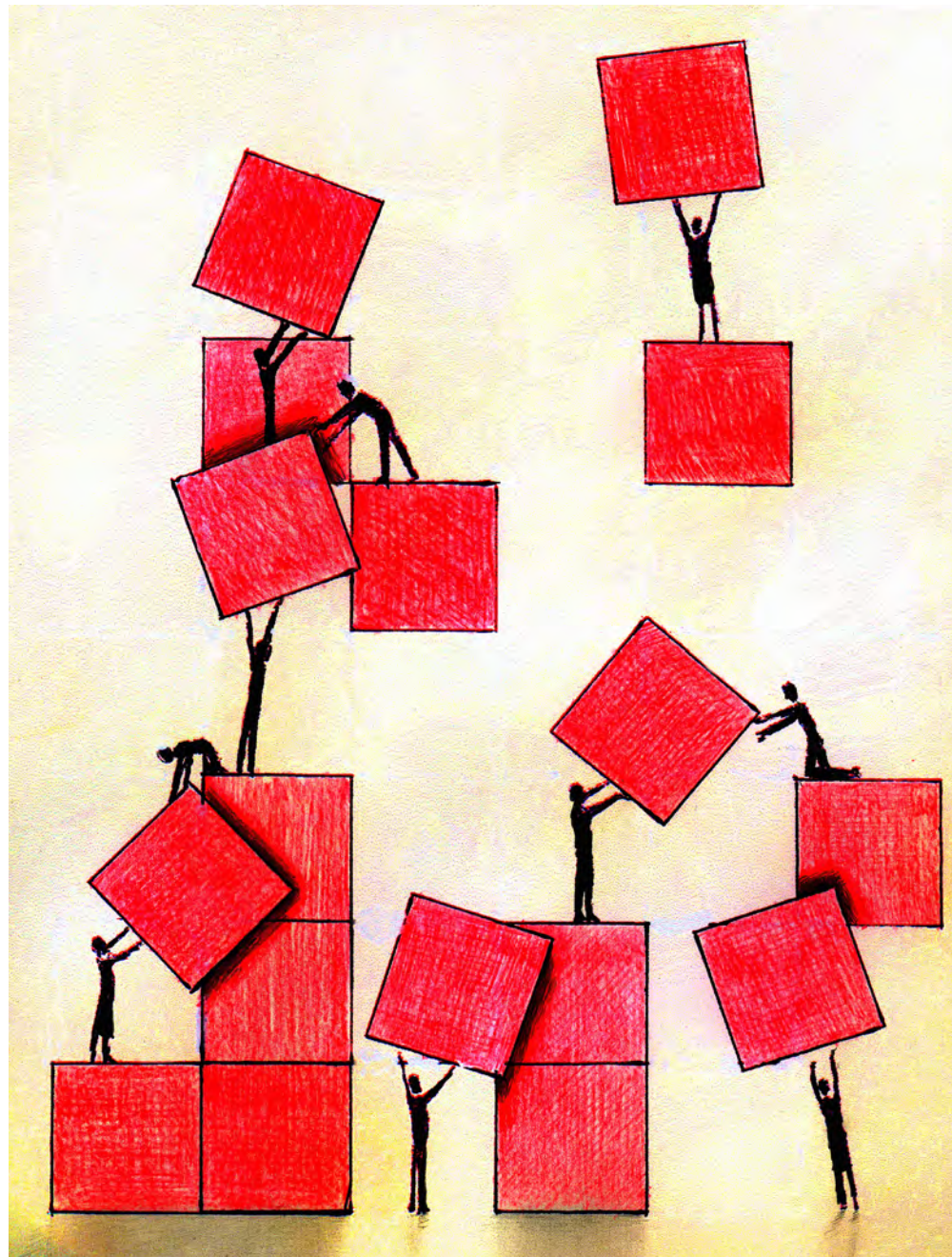
BY JASON RICHMOND

As the world emerges from the pandemic's irreversible effects, there is a vital need for employers to rethink how they train and support employees in developing the skills necessary to successfully move business forward. The spread of COVID-19 has thrown millions of people out of work—a predicament that could lead to skills atrophy, especially in soft skills such as empathy, communication, listening, collaborating, and providing feedback.

Therefore, the need to retrain is immense, and millions of workers will need training at the same time. As Ray Mabus, former US Navy secretary, former Mississippi governor, and current chair of the board at InStride, puts it in a *USA Today* opinion piece, “The scale of such an undertaking may be beyond anything our generation has seen, perhaps even larger than the re-training of millions of servicemen and women returning to the workforce after World War II.”

But there's another reason employers must rethink professional development in this new era: The composition of the workforce is changing, which will significantly influence the ways employees acquire and sustain skills. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that by 2030 the workforce will comprise 75 percent millennials.

“This generation wants it all: flexible schedules, diversity in the workplace, engagement, autonomy, and a meaningful connection with their employ-



ers,” write senior Bain executives in the *Harvard Business Review* article “Future-Proofing Your Organization.” They continue: “But with the trauma of COVID-19 fresh in our minds, we have all rediscovered the importance of meaningful jobs, supportive colleagues, and flexible employers.”

Those circumstances have led to a pivotal moment for L&D practitioners and the talent development industry at large. The demand has never been greater for organizations to embrace a new kind of learning culture that shifts training toward an emphasis on broad capability rather than specific skills. To succeed in that endeavor, leverage employee talents based on interests and strengths and create a blended approach between formal and on-the-job development of soft skills.

Building broad capability

The shift toward broad capability can be challenging because capabilities comprise the technical skills and knowledge people have, as well as individuals’ attributes, attitudes, and behaviors. What is required is a mind shift from training du jour and reactive curriculums to a comprehensive, strategic approach to L&D. And as part of the shift, leaders must accept that performance cannot always receive more emphasis than learning and experience. Understanding that is central to embracing a new era in employee development.

Think about the typical customer service performance environment, for example. Each week, a manager reviews the number of calls, talk time, problem resolution stats, and other performance criteria. But what if the manager was committed to the team’s capability development? She would still focus on the service performance data but may also ask team members questions that focus on learning and experience:

- What did you learn this week about our customer experience?
- Which solutions elicited the most positive response from customers?

- Did you try anything different to solve that problem?

Such an approach goes beyond performance data and helps strengthen employee problem-solving capabilities.

Leveraging employee talents based on interests and strengths

The evidence for concentrating on employees’ strengths is overwhelming. In extensive research, Gallup has found that when supervisors focus on worker strengths, there is only a one in 100 chance of employees becoming disengaged.

Assessing workers’ strengths is not difficult, and managers’ ability to do so will be critical in the new learning landscape. I find a combination works best: formal strengths or personality assessments along with conversations

groups, job shadowing, coaching, and mentoring, as well as formal classroom training. Many organizations waste valuable investments in formal training by not aligning it with coaching, mentoring, special projects, and work assignments. Get middle managers, in particular, invested in that alignment process.

There is great value in managers following up with their employees who engage in those activities to discuss what they learned and collaborate with them to find ways to apply learning on the job. Managers also can coach employees on applying what they learned and talk about how such application enhances productivity and other important job performance measurements. Doing so increases motivation and engagement, reinforces learning, and enhances performance.

The learning landscape has changed in ways that necessitate a new way of thinking about learning.

between an employee and their supervisor. In addition to strengths and personality assessments, leaders can take advantage of 360-degree assessments, which can be powerful tools when used in conjunction with coaching and other development. (I don’t recommend 360-degree assessments for performance management purposes but only for development.) Train managers on how to analyze assignments and projects to determine what skills are required for success and how to map employee strengths to them.

Develop a truly blended approach

Activities to enable people to acquire new capabilities should include on-the-job training, developmental job assignments, conferences, cohort

Focus more than ever on soft skills

Strengthening employees’ communication, empathy, collaboration, and problem-solving competencies are necessary to advance organizations in the right direction. What’s the right direction? It’s one in which the goal is to not only have a profitable company but an organization in which everyone feels respected and works well together. Accordingly, prioritize soft skills for the workforce and work to drive them deep into company culture.

LinkedIn Learning’s list of skills that are in top demand but low in supply placed soft skills at the top in both 2019 and 2020. Most recently, the list emphasized creativity, persuasion, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence.

Soft skills are important because they are transferable. They also give employees “career durability,” says Alexandra Levit, author of *Humanity Works: Merging Technologies and People for the Workforce of the Future*. “For someone to be successful 10 years down the road, they need to be resilient and be able to reinvent themselves in different learning environments,” she adds. But how can L&D professionals develop a more successful soft skills strategy in training programs?

Start by evaluating the state of your current training programs. Do they even begin to take into account soft skills development? Assess what the company’s best-performing employees do. What traits do they display that make them so successful? Do they communicate more? Do they collaborate? Are they team players?

Consider asking managers to provide specific feedback on team members’ soft skill weaknesses and proficiencies. A combination of self-assessments and 360-degree feedback reports can help zero in on the key soft skills that employees need to develop.

Customize

Off-the-shelf training programs rarely resonate with participants. Learners need to see the connection between content, the company culture, its business, and the work environment. If an orga-

nization does not have sufficient L&D capacity in-house, it can partner with a vendor that is adept at content and delivery customization.

Good vendors invest time in getting to know a company’s culture and incorporate its language into the content. They make sure to emphasize the corporate goals and priorities, and the people delivering the programs speak the company’s language. Learners tend to quickly dismiss training content that does not align with the work world they know. For example, simple factors such as how a company refers to its employees (team members, associates) or customers (clients) affect delivery credibility.

Continue to enhance digital learning

Digital solutions are here to stay. If done well, online training gets results and is cost-effective. That means replicating the interactive, behavioral, and performance-based experience of face-to-face classes in an online format. It also entails ensuring participants engage with each other in breakout rooms, write on the whiteboard, enter comments in a chat box, respond to polling questions, virtually raise their hands, and listen to their colleagues’ input.

Content designers must take a few additional logistical concerns into consideration when planning online

training. Most online classes require the commitment of two people: a virtual instructor with specialized facilitation skills and a certified digital producer. The producer facilitates the technology and troubleshoots any problems participants encounter so the trainer can remain focused on the audience. The instructor and producer work together seamlessly to make sure everything runs smoothly. That’s because technology takes up time: moving people in and out of breakout rooms and the time they take thinking about their responses before typing them in the chat or on a virtual whiteboard. Even with producers working their magic in the background, technical challenges occur and delays happen.

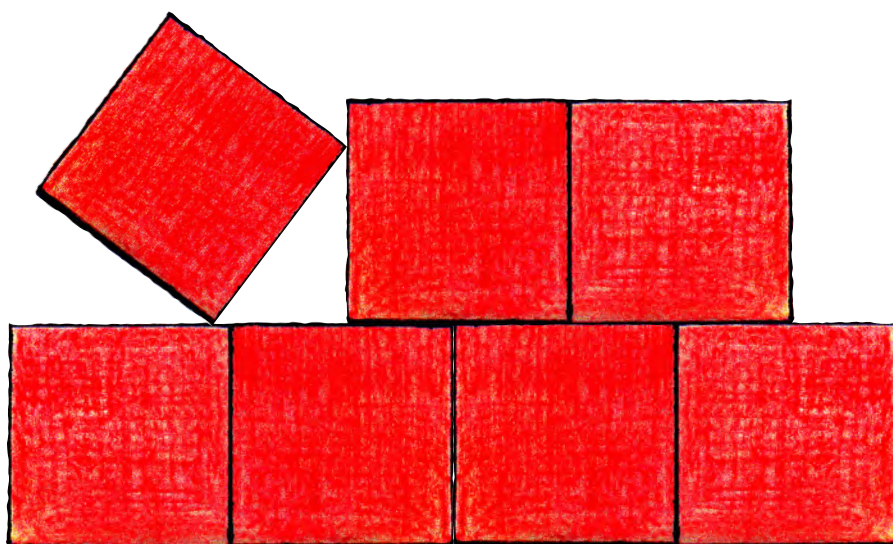
The adoption of fully digitized approaches to re-create the best of in-person learning through live video and social sharing is an essential enterprise strategy. To achieve such change, an emotional shift is equally as important as behavior change.

Adapt and evolve

The learning landscape has changed in ways that necessitate a new way of thinking about learning, development, and collaboration, and that will be essential to the rebuilding of any corporate learning culture postpandemic. Without emotional change, people will do something differently if they are required to, but they will often slip back into past habits and old ways of doing things unless they have a fundamental change in thinking, attitude, commitment, and other emotional factors.

Keeping those points in mind on this transformative journey makes it possible for L&D functions to scale training efforts in a more cost-effective way and permits greater personalization for learners—and, in turn, greater effectiveness.

Jason Richmond is author of *Culture Ignited: 5 Disciplines for Adaptive Leadership* and *Culture Spark: 5 Steps to Ignite and Sustain Organizational Growth* and is founder and CEO of Ideal Outcomes; jason@idealoutcomes.com.



Relax, Relate, Release

When staff stress spiked and morale and well-being started waning, this department developed a solution to address workers' needs.

BY JON MCKEEBY, DAVID OLSON, AND CYNTHIA WAY



Within the first month of the pandemic's arrival, the Department of Clinical Research Informatics (DCRI)—the IT department supporting the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center and the NIH Clinical Research Center—experienced a 20 percent increase in IT trouble tickets. Yet, the department didn't gain staffing to support the increased workload. The department's chief information officer, who also is the department head, noticed the impact of those added external stressors: He received reports, as well as observed, that people were getting tense with one another because the organization and customers set high expectations that management didn't validate or communicate to employees. Moreover, the virtual environment exacerbated silos between teams. Staff initiated workarounds and shortcuts to save time, which only made things worse for managing operations in the long run.

The Department of Clinical Research Informatics

Industry:
Government

Workforce Size:
200

L&D Staff Size:
9

HQ Location:
Bethesda, Maryland

Amid all that, employee poll results, supported by one-on-one supervisor-employee conversations, revealed that burnout had become a key issue affecting staff. People had already been working hard and juggling competing priorities, but COVID-19 increased that challenge exponentially. For instance, staff had to deal with the spike in federal requirements brought on by the pandemic and the challenges that came along with them. Likewise, on the home front, employees found themselves juggling the challenges of working from home, having children attend virtual school, caring for elderly relatives, and being concerned about the increased risk to their own physical and emotional health.

What were staff up against?

DCRI's 200 employees manage the IT infrastructure and provide support to functions that more than 4,000 staffers manage. The department was already a busy one, but when the pandemic hit, the importance of IT advanced to an entirely new level.

The clinical center's infrastructure enables clinicians and other key stakeholders to communicate with one another via the electronic health record

and various IT technologies including email, collaborative tools, and mobile devices. Those components became more critical during the pandemic in a way no one had previously imagined, with no warning or the luxury of a planning period or increased staffing to help manage it all.

Doctors and nurses needed to rely on technology more than ever to conduct rounds with their patients remotely because COVID-19 restrictions prevented them from seeing patients in person. Virtual healthcare and the technology to support it became a centerpiece for providing direct patient care. That added a new service line for the department—as well as employee stress and burnout.

Helping staff slow down

To find a solution to help staff cope with the added work and stressors, DCRI formed a leadership training working group, comprising key managers who had volunteered to be part of a leadership development effort. The working group invited a consultant with whom it had worked previously on systems-thinking training to help address the issues. Together, they started examining ways for employees to better pace themselves, sort through priorities in a world where everything became a priority, figure out how to reflect on what was happening, breathe, and strategize on how to move from reactive to proactive—indeed, a formidable task.

The working group realized that the solution needed to take a holistic, systemic view of the situation. Group members sought to change some cultural norms that existed before the pandemic started but amplified during it.

For example, a strong cultural norm among staff was letting the crisis of the hour override all other priorities—with good reason because any IT-related outages can literally have life or death implications. On the other hand, taking a strategic approach to addressing priorities helps the organization in the long run by preventing crises or improving the efficiency to deal with them.

To more effectively address that, the working group recognized that staff needed to slow down to make time—time they didn't feel they had. The working group provided tools to both deal with the crises of the hour and to pay attention to longer-term, strategic solutions. In that vein, DCRI leadership needed to give precedence to accountability and tracking actions, even if not directly related to resolving a crisis. Leadership also needed to focus on increasing positivity and morale.

Ultimately, the working group put a priority on addressing burnout and well-being and established four goals:

- Improve positivity and morale.
- Enhance communication.
- Prevent burnout and promote emotional well-being.
- Help people work better together.

DCRI began offering biweekly 15-minute virtual sessions on relaxation techniques that a yoga teacher and a mind/body coach led alternately. The solution also included monthly 90-minute workshops on topics such as running more effective virtual meetings, avoiding communication breakdowns, increasing positivity and morale, and reducing stress. Working group members selected those topics based on input from the CIO, their own observations as leaders, and discussions with other DCRI leaders.

A flavor of “warm and fuzzy” wasn't going to cut it in this demanding, high-paced environment with a culture of logic and reason. Therefore, the working group's approach to the workshops was to ground everything explicitly in research and neuroscience to make the experience highly experiential and interactive and to keep it relatively short. That meant converting skill building that the consultant previously offered in one-day workshops, often in person pre-pandemic, into 90-minute virtual segments.

The initiative started with monthly 90-minute virtual workshops on various topics for the leadership team. Then based on input from managers as well as employee surveys and polls, the working group realized the staff could benefit from the same workshops and added a second monthly one for them.

In addition, one of the recurring recommendations workshop participants raised was to have longer breaks between meetings, a policy the CIO quickly adopted, whereby all meetings initially scheduled for 60 minutes or more would end at 10 minutes before the hour. Accordingly, the working group cut workshops down to 80 minutes.

Facilitators began each workshop with an appreciation protocol, a skill taught in one of the first workshops that became an icebreaker for each subsequent session. During the activity, each participant types a three-part appreciation in the chat box for another participant, thus generating positivity and improving morale. Further, targeted one-on-one coaching, team coaching, and a separate coaching program rolled out. Anyone in the organization could sign up any given month and receive one hour of coaching by a credentialed coach of their choice with a 30-minute follow-up the next month.

The working group learned early on that it was crucial to get managers' support and buy-in, from the first-level supervisors to senior leadership. It saw attendance and participation increase as the managers proactively encouraged their teams to attend the workshops, cleared the calendar of conflicting meetings, and made it a priority in their calendars as well, basically modeling the behavior they wanted to see.

Rewarding outcomes

After every workshop, participants took a poll and assessment regarding their burnout levels. Although the workshops received high scores, there was no corresponding decrease in burnout levels. The initiative launched in early 2020, and a climate survey in August 2021 sought to take a deeper dive into what was causing the burnout and gauge the approach's long-term efficacy.

While the working group had plenty of anecdotal evidence pointing to success, it was validating to see the objective results. Survey results indicate that 100 percent of the DCRI leadership team members who participated in the workshops on communication, destressing, emergent learning,

self-fulfilling prophecies, managing up, listening, coaching, or delegating found the workshops helpful in their jobs. And between 90 percent and 95 percent likewise reported that the other workshops on effective meetings, positivity and morale, wellness, and accountability were helpful. While not as high as the leadership team's scores, staff's evaluations garnered strong numbers regarding the helpfulness of those workshops, ranging from 83 percent to 91 percent.

With respect to burnout, assessment results reveal that managers attributed 24 percent of burnout to circumstances outside of the work environment, while staff attributed 50 percent of burnout to circumstances outside of the work environment. That data shows that there were some factors within the working group's control and some that were not. Nonetheless, the results confirmed that staff needed help dealing with stress.

Based on the survey responses, as well as input from the working group and the themes that emerged from the pool of coaches working with individuals or teams, the working group created a 2022 workshop schedule to address ongoing employee needs. The focus for this year will continue to be on staff well-being and will include the launch of a seven-part series on positive intelligence

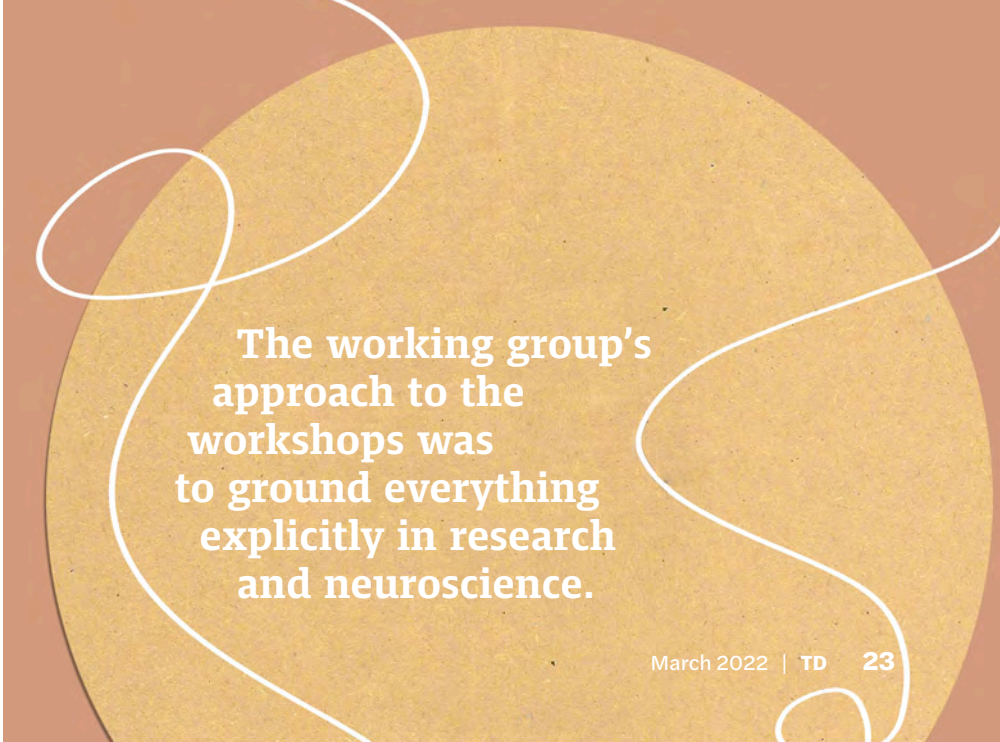
(PQ), increasing the 15-minute relaxation techniques to weekly, and offering an intensive "PQ Pod" for those who want to increase their capacity for handling both their work and personal stressors with a positive mindset and increased resilience. For managers, the emphasis will be on increasing skill to have difficult conversations, managing priorities better, developing their staff, and balancing firefighting with strategic goals.

As a result of efforts to move the needle on staff burnout, working group members and their partnering consultant received the 2021 NIH Clinical Center CEO Award, in the Quality of Work Life and Well Being category, in recognition of their outstanding achievement in providing this comprehensive training program.

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The working group's approach to the workshops was to ground everything explicitly in research and neuroscience.

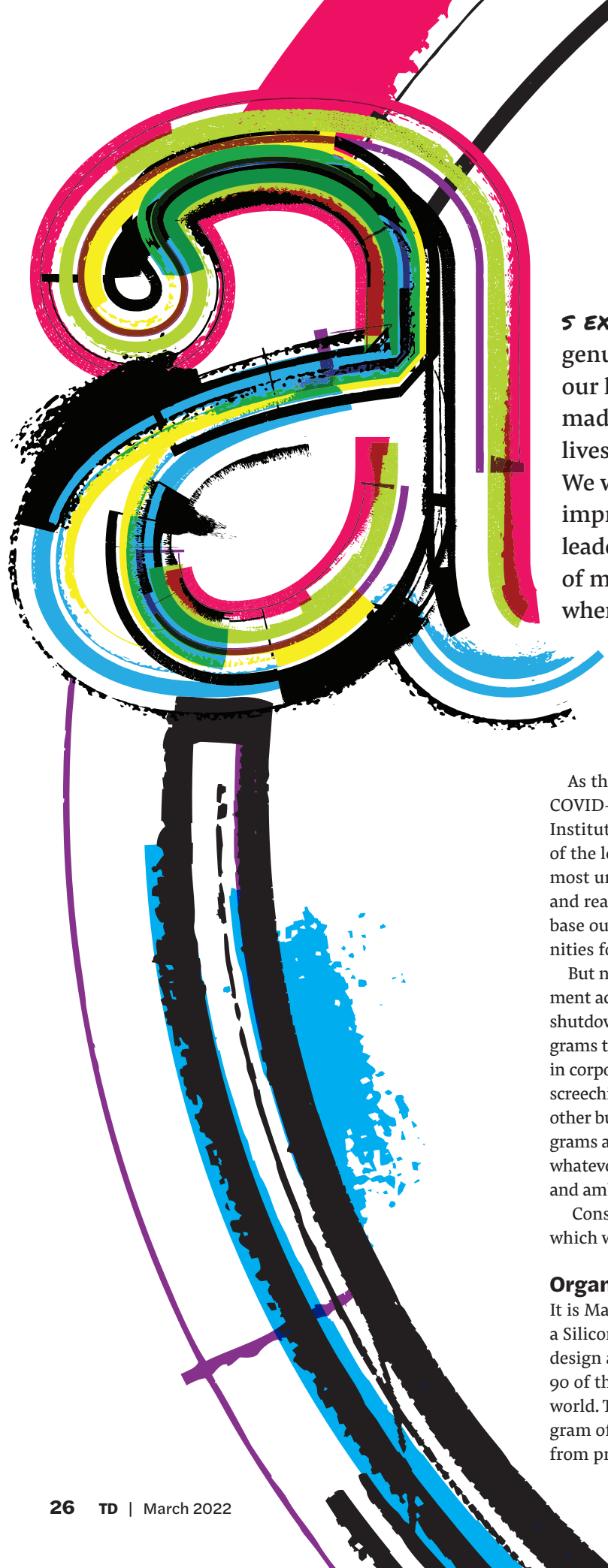
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These key components
will lead to effective
programs.

BY JOELLE K. JAY AND
RALUCA GRAEBNER



LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT MUST-HAVES



5 EXECUTIVE COACHES AND FACILITATORS, genuine expressions of gratitude that indicate our leadership development programs have made a real and lasting difference in leaders' lives are the kind of comments we dream of. We want the organizations we work with to improve their business results through those leaders and advance diverse and talented slates of managers into senior levels of leadership where they can help shape the company's future.

As the world is getting used to a "new normal" informed by the COVID-19 pandemic, we and our team at the Leadership Research Institute (LRI) have been reflecting on the successes and failures of the leadership development programs we have seen during this most unusual of times. What we have learned has both surprised and reassured us. Ultimately, the five key principles on which we base our work have stood up to the challenge and created opportunities for leaders to emerge prepared, thoughtful, and successful.

But not all organizations have approached leadership development accordingly. The sudden shock of the pandemic, the global shutdown of office spaces, and the overnight move from live programs to virtual that have characterized the past couple of years in corporate life could have brought leadership development to a screeching halt, and indeed in some companies they did. However, other businesses have sustained robust leadership development programs and provided more support to their leaders, not less—making whatever changes necessary to pull it off, even amid the confusion and ambiguity that the past two years have brought.

Consider the contrasting experiences of two organizations with which we worked.

Organization 1: Rising to the occasion

It is March 2020. A team from the talent development function in a Silicon Valley firm has been working for two months with us to design and deliver two weeks of live, interactive programming for 90 of the firm's most promising women leaders from around the world. Those two weeks kick off Leadership Circles, a yearlong program of personal leadership that has yielded impressive results from previous cohorts:

- A total of 600 women have gone through the program globally.
- In one division alone, 40 percent of participants have been promoted compared to 17 percent of women globally.
- Seventy-six percent of participants are still with the company compared to 55 percent of women globally.

As the program's opening day comes into view, LRI coaches and facilitators are packing their bags to fly to company headquarters to deliver the program, along with participants from as far away as India and Australia.

Meanwhile, news of the pandemic is heating up. One surprising and unsettling COVID-19 death in the US becomes a rash of illness, and then a scare, and then a panic as airlines start expressing concern and as events get canceled. Clearly this virus is serious—so much so that our team hesitates as we start to set foot into airports, wondering, “Is this really a good idea?” Our partners at the firm agree—all travel for employees halts effective immediately.

We cancel our flights and get on the phone with our partners. With only a few days at our disposal, we move opening day events online; design virtual experiences; send electronic versions of program materials to participants; and with celebration and excitement, kick off another year of Leadership Circles.

We get some of the best results we have ever seen. Participants reported:

- Increased focus on delivering on strategic priorities, without getting sidetracked by the pandemic's ever-moving landscape
- Hitting and overachieving on sales quotas during an unprecedented time of uncertainty
- Stepping up as influential, caring leaders and stewards of their teams
- Less burnout, more connection, and better support from their organization

The spontaneous flexibility created a program that supported leaders through the crisis. It was a win for all of us: our client partners, LRI, and the program participants. The program continued in 2021, still virtually, welcoming a new global cohort of women.

Unfortunately, such wins weren't everywhere. In fact, we also saw the crisis of the pandemic become a crisis of leadership in other companies.

Organization 2: The doors slam shut

It is spring 2020, and plans are going into place for fall programming in a large international firm built on promoting talented leaders from within and with well-established, large-scale leadership development programs to help support its strategy.

Until the pandemic.

As uncertainty spreads, the company postpones planning meetings with LRI to discuss leadership development programming. It misses deadlines to ensure timely program rollout. It moves program dates, and then the whole initiative is threatened and eventually canceled. Communication from program organizers to LRI grinds to a halt.

Few employees received promotions that year, and staff reported having fewer opportunities for personal or professional

growth. It was as if the entire company had pushed pause on progress—which is understandable due to the pandemic. But as we've seen from other companies, it's unnecessary. The effect on the firm's leaders did not go unnoticed.

Now, individual employees in the company—the superstars whom the firm once would have invited to participate in the elite leadership development programs intended to support their success—are calling us for coaching. They're questioning their commitment to their employer, wondering where their careers are headed, and trying to find a way to get back their energy and enthusiasm for an organization that seems to have left them hanging. Some have become part of the Great Resignation.

That's not exactly a good situation for any employer.

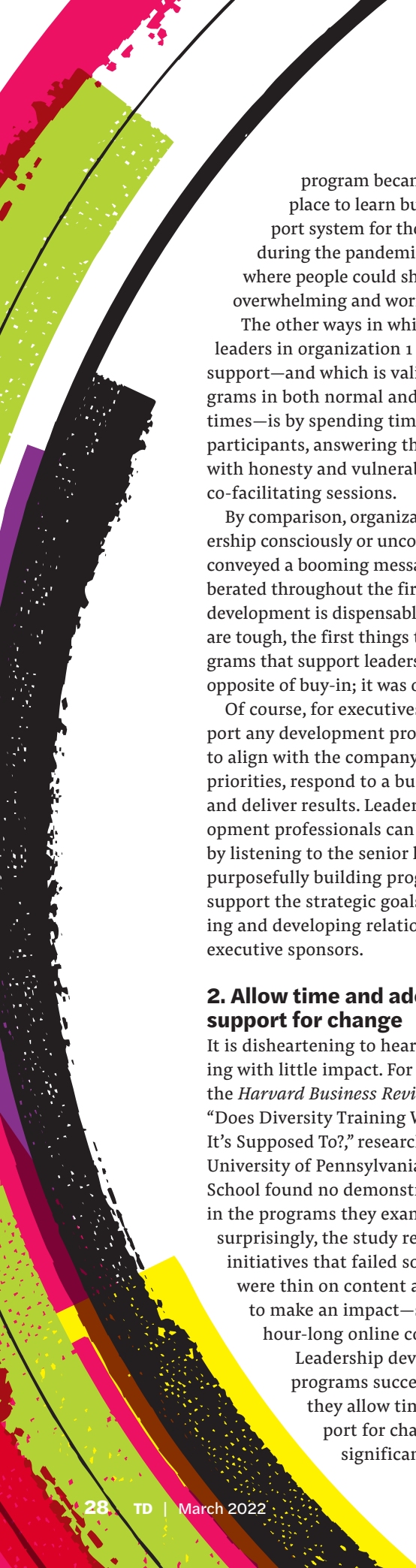
Rethinking postpandemic leadership development

Simply put, organization 1 managed leadership development successfully; organization 2 did not. As employers navigate a new reality of hybrid work and with the pandemic still influencing decision making, we offer five must-haves for leadership development that make the difference between a transformational experience (think organization 1) and one that's “meh” (think organization 2).

1. Gain true buy-in from the top

No matter how engaging a program is, if participants know that senior leaders do not endorse the experience, it will be hard to truly prioritize learning. What executives say is important (for instance, praising the program), but what they do is even more powerful.

For example, it spoke volumes when the leaders in organization 1 decided to dedicate funding in support of employee well-being and growth. The 2020 iteration of the Leadership Circles



program became not just a place to learn but also a support system for the participants during the pandemic—a safe space where people could share what was overwhelming and worrying them.

The other ways in which senior leaders in organization 1 proved their support—and which is valid for all programs in both normal and extraordinary times—is by spending time with the participants, answering their questions with honesty and vulnerability, and co-facilitating sessions.

By comparison, organization 2's leadership consciously or unconsciously conveyed a booming message that reverberated throughout the firm: Leadership development is dispensable, and if times are tough, the first things to go are programs that support leaders. That was the opposite of buy-in; it was opt-out.

Of course, for executives to fully support any development program, it needs to align with the company's strategic priorities, respond to a business need, and deliver results. Leadership development professionals can ensure that by listening to the senior leaders and purposefully building programs that support the strategic goals and by finding and developing relationships with executive sponsors.

2. Allow time and adequate support for change

It is disheartening to hear about training with little impact. For example, in the *Harvard Business Review* article "Does Diversity Training Work the Way It's Supposed To?," researchers at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School found no demonstrable impact in the programs they examined. Not surprisingly, the study reveals that the initiatives that failed so miserably were thin on content and too brief to make an impact—such as an hour-long online course.

Leadership development programs succeed when they allow time and support for change. They are significant solutions—

either weeklong, intensive experiences or yearlong, integrative programs where stakeholders encourage participants to continuously incorporate their learning at work.

Organization 1's program included personalized coaching, interactive experiences, and peer group support. Organization 2 had already chopped away at its leadership development program, bit by bit, even before the pandemic, putting savings over value. When the pandemic began, the program became a casualty of the chaos, because it did not have the depth and breadth that would have made it essential in any era, COVID-19 or otherwise.

Providing adequate time and support for change leads to impressive results, giving companies that invest in their leaders in that way a significant return on their investment. When making financial decisions, L&D professionals should consider what brings true value and what investments are worth making.

3. Offer customized, relevant content

We have heard many horror stories of leadership development programs delivering content that is, at best, too generic and, at worst, completely mismatched to the company's culture.

Take time to diagnose the business need and customize the program content so that it matches the organization's experiences, culture, and strategic priorities. That may entail incorporating the company's vernacular, welcoming guest speakers from the organization, and developing a battery of stories relevant to each environment.

Participants of leadership development programs that are customized with specific, relevant content reflective of their company and work environment will be able to contextualize their learning immediately. Customized and relevant content derives from forming partnerships with the stakeholders. Serve as a trusted advisor and true co-creator.

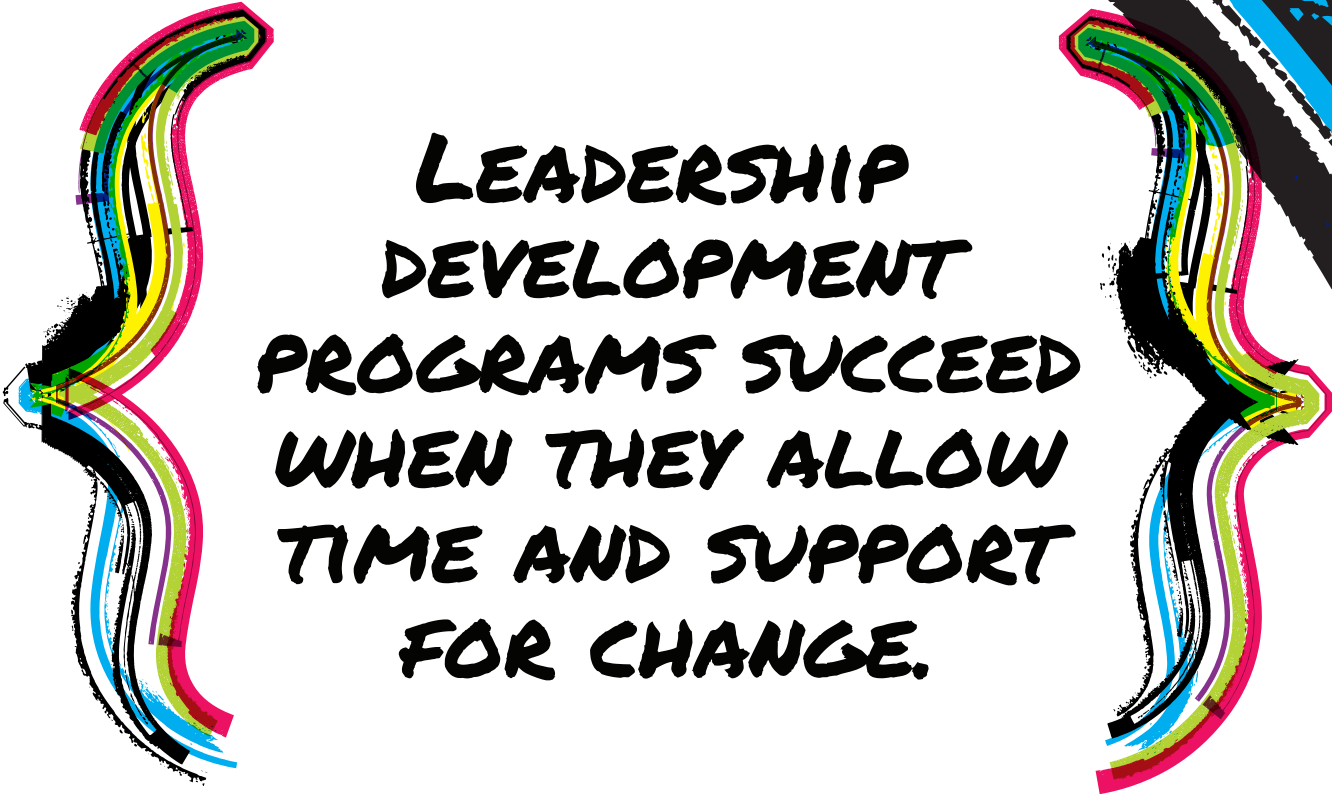
In organization 1, we are trusted partners collaborating on a joint effort to customize learning that is integral to the success of the business and its leaders—an effort worth preserving on both sides. By contrast, in organization 2, we are considered vendors offering a program—something easily cut.

4. Work with the right people

The right choice of facilitators is vital for leadership development's success. Excellent facilitators can take any content, make it their own, and create extraordinary experiences for participants. Poor facilitators can deliver even rich information in such a fashion that it feels rigid and rote.

Take, for example, a discussion during one of our programs that started going haywire. A participant strongly voiced her disagreement with a point the facilitator made. Soon other participants followed suit, piling on top of each other and jeopardizing the discussion's credibility.

It was one of those moments that could make or break a program. The facilitator could have stood her ground, attempting to convince participants of her point of view and leaving them feeling lectured. Instead, she listened sincerely, acknowledged the difficulties with compassion, and then invited others to



LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS SUCCEED WHEN THEY ALLOW TIME AND SUPPORT FOR CHANGE.

share differing opinions. Her presence created a space that held the conversation lightly and guided people through a meaningful discussion.

Powerful facilitators welcome innovation and creative collaboration. They have the courage to stay open to ideas and to vulnerably allow their programs to evolve in service to the company and program participants.

5. Tell stories with numbers

Measuring a program's success works best when it entails—before the program starts—using a researcher's mindset, curiosity, and methods (such as interviews) to understand the organization and map out the situation. And then measure the program's impact.

Listen to the feedback from the business—including program sponsors, executives, and program facilitators—as well as from current and former participants. Likewise, it is essential to communicate the success to the business—to show the hard results and tell the story of why the program matters. That gets everyone excited.

For example, in organization 1, we and our in-house L&D partners created a strategic way to measure program impact and communicate it internally to relevant stakeholders and executive sponsors. As a result, before new participants even set foot in the program's opening event, they have heard about it from their managers or former participants.

Organization 2 didn't support the element of quality measurement in its program. In doing so, the firm saved money but lost the opportunity to get information about whether the initiative was indeed making an impact. Thus, leadership didn't consider a program that by informal accounts was having a significant impact to be critical because there was no data to prove the case.

Emphasize the importance of research as a way of measuring program impact. Storytelling with numbers is one way to prove that leadership development is worth the investment.

Persevere during hard times

The past two years have seen unprecedented change. However, what has not changed are the fundamental pillars of what creates a powerful leadership development experience. In-person or virtually, the principles of human learning and personal transformation remain the same. It is about creating a sustained, supportive experience in which leaders learn from each other, exchange powerful ideas, and can experiment safely as they grow into leaders who will carry their companies into the future.

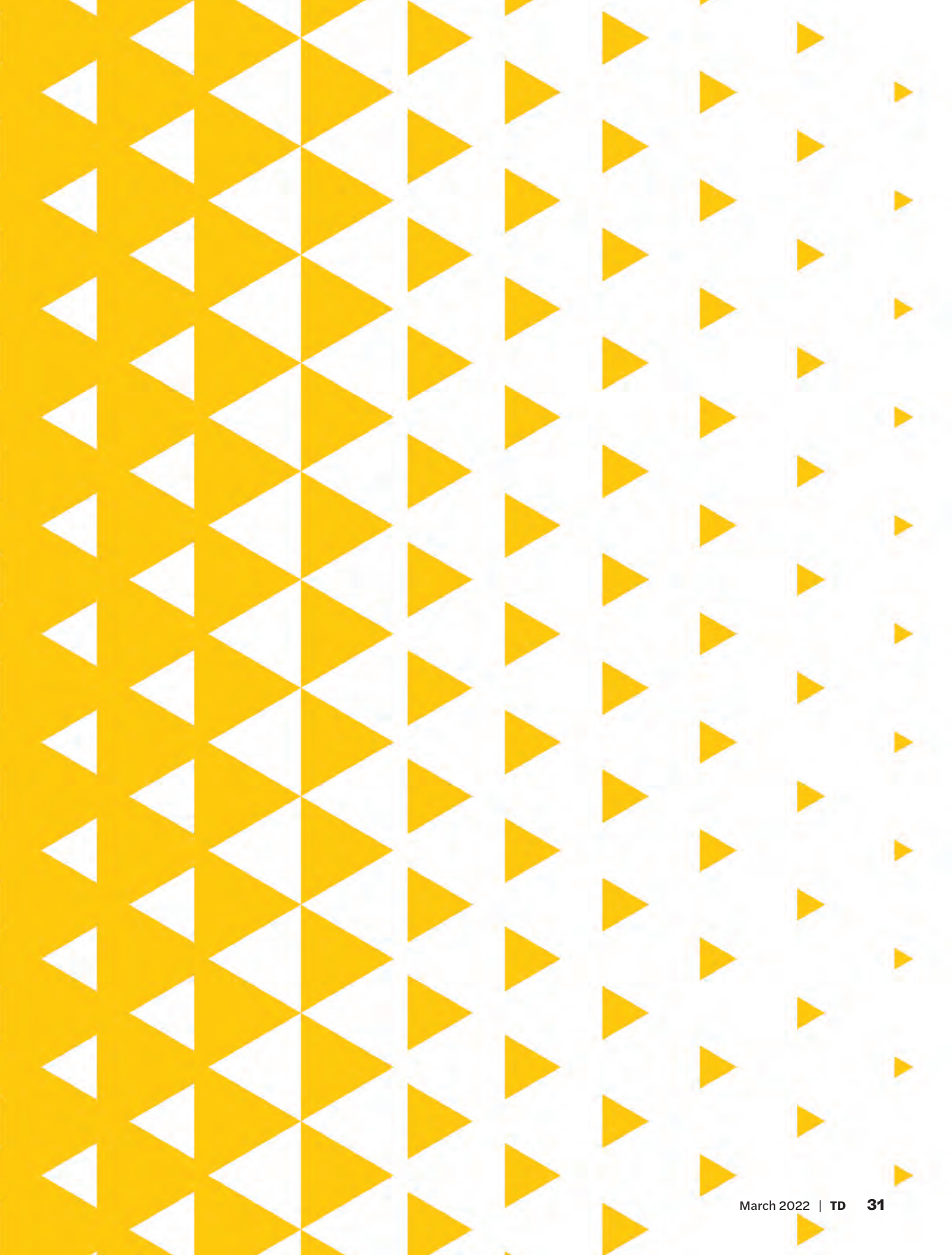
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FROM TECHNICAL EXPERT TO PEOPLE LEADER

High performers don't necessarily make good managers—unless they receive the proper leadership training.

BY CORINA WALSH





For years, the advice from management consultants and leadership coaches regarding building a strong leadership bench inside a company was: Don't promote your best technical employees—you will lose a good employee and gain a bad manager. For fast-growth technology and knowledge-based companies, that advice is not helpful for two reasons.

First, the reality for today's workplace is that companies are growing, and someone must step up and lead a team. Most often, employers will tap the strongest technical person to lead the team because they already know the work and the team and can train and guide new team members. Vetting and hiring a manager from the outside will take time, and most companies today want to move fast.

Second, it is unfair for a manager to hold back a direct report from taking a leadership role because the employee is a strong technical performer whom the manager doesn't want to lose. After all, Gallup reports that 45 percent of millennials say that a job that accelerates their professional or career development is very important to them. If a company prevents its strong technical performers from advancing, it will likely lose good employees to employers that have a clear leadership and career development path.

So, how can organizations build a leadership pipeline from within using their strongest technical players? An effective strat-

egy for any employer is to ensure all managers are getting the type of leadership development they need to succeed at every level of management. Each leadership level will come with its own demands and challenges. That means frontline, midlevel, and senior managers who began their careers as technical experts will require different types of training and coaching at each stage to develop their people skills and succeed in that role.

My experience as a leadership coach who has worked with hundreds of managers tells me that the first leadership transition from technical expert to frontline manager is often the toughest leadership transition to navigate. Companies need a clear leadership development path that starts with supporting their expert individual performers in developing their people-leadership abilities to build a strong foundation for future leadership roles.

What to look for in technical experts

Many employees get promoted to team lead or supervisor out of necessity. The organization is growing, teams are adding new people, and the teams need an official leader. Often the strongest technical person gets promoted because of a halo effect where the com-

Training and coaching are essential to support the transformation from expert employee to engaging people manager, so don't overlook the one attribute of being coachable when trying to identify an emerging leader.

Supporting the transitions

After identifying a technical rock star as having leadership potential and promoting them into their first management role, enroll them in management training so that they can begin building a foundation of people-leadership skills as quickly as possible. The training should include topics such as communicating expectations, delegating, delivering feedback, coaching on the spot, and navigating difficult conversations. The sooner a new technical expert manager builds a toolbox with those essentials, the faster they will get comfortable and confident embracing the people side of the management role.

In the past, most management and leadership development programs involved learning about management. However, effective management training happens when managers learn how to perform management functions such as giving

**IT IS RARE FOR ANY EXPERT
EMPLOYEE TO TRANSFORM
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pany assumes that the individual's strong expertise and technical ability mean they will also be competent as a team leader.

However, employers should go beyond strong expertise and technical ability and try to spot other characteristics and skills that would make someone a good manager. Such characteristics include good communication skills, empathy, and a natural ability to coach and bring out the best in others. Most importantly, ensure that any technical expert being considered for promotion to management is coachable.

It is rare for any expert employee to transform into an effective people leader organically over time.

feedback and delegating effectively. For example, consider a six-month program for frontline managers where participants learn one skill each month and have time to go back to work and apply their new skill. They then return to training for the next module and have time to discuss their challenges and celebrate their wins.

With a solid foundation built in the first stage through group training, once a frontline manager gets promoted to midlevel manager, training in topics such as managing other managers, team dynamics, emotional intelligence, and managing up and across is essential.

POST-TRAINING PRACTICE IS NECESSARY

A key mistake that companies make after they send their managers to management training is to assume the training program is all the new manager requires to develop their skills. However, after managers have attended training, they also need the opportunity to practice their new skills in low-risk situations at work so they can put those skills into context. That will give individuals who received promotions for their technical abilities the chance to build confidence in their people-leadership abilities while also minimizing the impact that they can have on team members.

Supporting managers who came from a technical role to gradually build people-management capabilities is a strategic approach to leadership development and is the opposite of the baptism-by-fire method that unfortunately many companies still use. When technical-experts-turned-managers get the opportunity to build their capacity to handle increasing levels of responsibility over time instead of getting thrown into management roles cold, they tend to take more ownership over their leadership development.

An example of a low-risk situation could be the opportunity to practice giving feedback or having a difficult conversation with a colleague who can give the new manager guidance on their approach.

When a former technical expert reaches senior management, they should work one-on-one with a leadership coach to further develop the leadership behaviors and mindset necessary to navigate complexity, adapt to change, and become a strategic thinker, all of which are typically required of senior leaders.

Technical experts face different challenges along each stage of the leadership journey. Therefore, leadership development may also require a certain level of customization to be effective in preparing managers to overcome specific challenges at each stage.

As an example, a new technical-expert-turned-manager in my group program for frontline managers embraced learning the skills in each module. However, the feedback from her team indicated that although she was delivering feedback and delegating (as she learned in the program), she still lacked empathy in her communication, especially if one of her employees missed a deadline. Many of the technical teams she was a part of as an individual performer believed that direct communication was essential to getting the work done. When I learned of that development need, I worked with the new manager to help her understand that a people leader's communication style requires more consideration and tact because of how employees take in communication and feedback from their manager versus a peer.

The people side of team leadership

Some technical experts who move into a management role may be content to lead the technical work but will not embrace the people part of leading a team. After all, that's not what they studied and trained for.

When one of my clients, a senior technical manager in a production design firm, was struggling to let go of the technical side of the work, his colleague pulled him aside to give him some "radical candor" about his management style. My client thought he was successfully managing a project team by running around and managing the project's technical aspects when in fact he was preventing his junior team leads from learning the nuances of leading a complex, inter-departmental project.

The client's colleague gave him feedback, saying "the project can't progress at the rate of you," and reminded him that his own career would stall if he didn't pass on his knowledge to junior leaders and embrace his people management role.

Working with a leadership coach can help managers open their eyes to their blind spots, and a technical-expert-turned-manager who is having difficulty delegating and sharing knowledge will also need to hear candid feedback in real time from peers they trust. Feedback from different sources can help a technical manager who is reluctant to delegate realize the im-

pact they are having on the progress of the team, the company, and their own career. Hearing similar comments from different people means the feedback is not just one person's perspective.

Setting and resetting expectations early about the management style required to effectively scale gets ahead of situations where newly promoted expert team leads may struggle to let go of the technical work. Technical-experts-turned-managers giving away their job, so to speak, is a necessary component for scaling a company, especially fast-growth tech firms. Cementing that expectation as part of the organizational culture can help the new managers understand the importance of letting go of the work and passing on their knowledge to the emerging leaders behind them.

It is also important to connect new learning and expectations to their current knowledge. Remind new technical expert managers that the skills they use to collaborate on technical work, such as communicating required changes to a design or troubleshooting a software bug, are the same skills they need to initiate and conduct performance conversations with an employee. Instead of designing new software, they are designing how a group of people can work together to bring an idea to life. New managers often need someone to help them realize they already have a foundation for building people-leadership skills.

Feedback and mentoring

As mentioned, a process for ensuring all new and experienced managers receive feedback from their direct reports, manager, and peers is critical to developing managers at every level in a company. In the spirit of growth and development, feedback should be delivered up, across, and down.

Receiving real-time feedback from team members can help technical expert managers understand the impact their management style is having on their team. Receiving consistent feedback throughout the year, not just during annual performance reviews, also will enable managers to adjust their approach and self-correct before negative management habits become ingrained and they must unlearn those patterns. Performance management software can come prepopulated with feedback questions and is designed to appeal to technical expert employees and managers.

Peer mentoring is another essential leadership development tool. Employees working in tech and knowledge-based companies are accustomed to learning with and from their peers to build their technical skills. As such, create leadership communities of practice (Slack channels are a great place to start) where

managers at all levels meet regularly to discuss the challenges and wins they experience in leading a team.

Common leadership development mistakes

One of the biggest missteps employers make in terms of leadership development is arbitrarily deciding what development a manager will need without considering each person's real learning needs. Some companies will look to hire a leadership coach to work one-on-one with a technical expert manager who is experiencing issues with the people side of leading their team when that manager hasn't yet attended management training.

On the surface it can look like a manager is struggling with embracing leadership behaviors such as inspiring the best possible performance from their team. However, what is often the issue is that the manager has not received the proper training on skills such as giving effective and useful feedback or coaching an employee on the spot.

There is a time to train and a time to coach. Training is for skills development, whereas coaching as a development tool is best for ensuring managers have the right mindset, behaviors, perspective, and sense of purpose.

While all managers can benefit from working one-on-one with a leadership coach, I find that it's better for a technical expert manager to first gain the skills they need to lead a team. Once a manager develops those skills, it is much easier to determine whether that individual is having difficulty with people management—such as avoiding initiating feedback or career conversations with direct reports—or is simply lacking the know-how to navigate those conversations.

The longer managers are in their role without proper training, the greater the likelihood that they will develop negative management habits based on coping instead of thriving. It also increases the chances they will pass on bad habits to newer managers they may be mentoring.

Often in my group management programs, not long after the first session, the managers in the room begin to feel badly about how they have been leading their teams. They realize there was so much they didn't know and now feel embarrassed about how they handled certain situations with their direct reports. Ensuring that all technical-experts-turned-managers have mastered the fundamentals of leading a team will guarantee that the company (and its leaders) have a solid foundation for growth for years to come.

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FYI on Measuring the ROI of Executive Coaching



There are different ways to
prove its effectiveness.

BY JODY MICHAEL



Leadership development is a rewarding undertaking, but the interpersonal nature of executive coaching makes it hard for companies to measure a tangible return on its investment. Trying to put a dollar amount on the benefits of coaching for employees may be difficult, but proof exists. For example:

- “Case Study on the Return on Investment of Executive Coaching” reveals that a Fortune 500 company’s executive coaching initiative produced a 529 percent ROI and significant benefits such as overall productivity and employee satisfaction. When factoring in employee retention, the ROI jumps to 788 percent.
- According to “Maximizing the Impact of Executive Coaching,” a survey of 100 executives mostly from Fortune 1000 companies, an investment in executive coaching realized an average ROI of almost six times the cost of the coaching.
- The *What Is Coaching?* report cites research indicating that the ROI of coaching can range between 221 percent and 788 percent.

Besides comparing financial gains compared to costs paid, you can measure success in other ways, both tangibly and intangibly. Tangible benefits of executive coaching include:

- Increased productivity
- Higher performance levels
- Reduced costs
- Growth in revenue and sales

- Higher employee retention
- Higher employee engagement

Intangible benefits include:

- Increased emotional intelligence
- Higher confidence
- Strengthening of executive presence
- Better communication
- Enhanced situational leadership skills
- Embracing accountability
- Stronger work relationships

The challenge with measuring coaching

Despite all those positives that can result from executive coaching, it continues to be difficult to measure because of a multitude of factors, ranging from not having a controlled environment to different peoples’ perception of what *change* means.

Take, for instance, a 360-degree review I completed for an executive coaching client for which I interviewed 15 stakeholders both prior to the coaching engagement and after its completion eight months later. When I asked them whether they had perceived change or improvement in

the coachee, everyone answered with a resounding yes—except for one person. That stakeholder said he didn't observe any change at all. However, when I referred to my initial interview with the stakeholder and read back to him his observations, it was apparent the coachee had indeed changed—in fact, quite dramatically. Taken aback, the stakeholder commented, “His behavior changed so much, I completely forgot how he was before.”

That example demonstrates how stakeholder subjectivity is an area that makes results hard to measure. Further, people can come into the situation already having perceived beliefs about change itself. If someone believes that people don't change, that person is going to have a difficult time discerning change in anyone. Individuals tend to base their perspectives on opinions, not facts, and can also overindex on certain factors.

In assessing success from executive coaching engagements, a coach may speak with someone who interacts daily with the coachee as well as someone who only collaborates with them quarterly. The problem is that those measuring success often apply equal weight to those stakeholder perspectives.

With that consideration in mind, 360-degree assessments administered pre- and post-engagement are indeed the most accurate way to measure leadership competencies—ranging from decisiveness and delegation to active listening and effective feedback—that executive coaching can cultivate. In addition to asking a coachee-leader to complete a self-assessment, give the assessment to eight to 20 stakeholders to get their opinions of the leader. The more assessments compiled, the greater the accuracy of the cumulative scores.

Measuring on tactics vs. change

One way to ensure you're measuring the effectiveness of executive coaching is to focus on the type of coach who is working with a particular leader. A tactical coach versus a transformational coach working on systemic change will likely elicit different results.

Consider a senior leader who doesn't reach out cross-functionally to build relationships. A tactical coach could structure an assignment for the

coachee to measure (check off) every time they reach out cross-functionally to stakeholders. At the end of six months, the coach may see a long list of check marks that indicates that the executive addressed the issue a certain number of times.

Many executives would be happy with that result, but here's why it may be shortsighted: The leader could just be checking the box because it's required of them during coaching—it doesn't mean they have systemically learned the behavior. And one year later, the executive will likely be back to their old behavior because no deep transformative change occurred. Or the coachee may have built the habit and is still applying it, but it's transactional in nature rather than a process of meaningfully building a relationship with the stakeholders.

A different coach may choose to pinpoint an underlying fear that addresses the root cause, such as discomfort with intimacy or lack of self-esteem. If

The benefits of executive coaching will trickle down the organization to other employees.

a coach addresses the root of the problem, behavioral results will follow. A rubber band effect—in which the executive reverts to old behavior—will be less likely. Instead, there will be a domino effect where the learning translates to other domains, which results in a bigger ROI for the company.

For instance, I worked with a client, “Angelique,” whose supervisor sought a coach for her to address what the supervisor called unprofessional behavior. The supervisor had observed Angelique saying flirtatious things to co-workers and acting inappropriately. After I met with Angelique, I



realized that her supervisor was only seeing the symptom of the problem, but the real issue was Angelique's insecurity. Whenever she felt insecure, she turned toward flirtatious behavior. It's something she had been doing all her life that had become an automatic behavior. Therefore, simply telling Angelique to stop being a flirt certainly wasn't going to be effective.

During our coaching engagements, the real work entailed breaking down the behavior and creating mindfulness. By practicing self-awareness and working through the discomfort, Angelique was able to break the cycle so that when she started to feel insecure, she was aware of it and was eventually able to not allow the next step to occur. As a result, Angelique was able to change her mindset and reaction so that she no longer made her co-workers uncomfortable. Now, her inappropriate flirting is a distant memory.

In the cross-functional relationships example above, the approaches the tactical coach and the transformation coach each took factor into whether long-term change will result from coaching engagements. The key is to identify—before coaching begins—the exact behavioral change the company wants to see from the coachee-leader. Then when selecting a coach, consider someone

who is well trained in developing emotional intelligence and psychology to competently handle more complex issues. In addition, seek individuals who have measurement protocols built into their coaching and who will conduct the pre- and post-interviews with stakeholders.

Those factors help to control the variable of the coach to some degree. The coach can then compare the stakeholders' opinions and more easily see when the leader's change is authentic. As mentioned before, sometimes the coachee has changed so much that the stakeholders don't even remember the *before* person, because they've been interacting with the *after* person to great success.

Making an impact

Leaders should start off a coaching engagement by being consistent in what factors will be measured and how those factors will be measured from engagement to engagement. To set up a coaching engagement to be measured for success:

- Establish the business results you want the leader to achieve.
- Outline the leadership behaviors they need to exhibit and sustain.
- Identify the corresponding results you want to show up within the leader's team.

How to Hire an Executive Coach

In addition to the standards of an executive coach already discussed, other factors separate quality coaches from the rest.

Qualifications. Unfortunately, the coaching industry is not regulated, which means anyone can call themselves a coach. Vet coaches' experience carefully by inquiring about what types of coaching experience they have (corporate is a must), training, credentials (the International Coaching Federation is respected worldwide), level of credentials (an indication of hours of experience), and psychology background.

Methodology. Look for a coach who has developed their own methodology over time. Be wary of individuals who sell a one-size-fits-all approach to coaching.

Coaching engagement. In addition to asking about the length of the coaching engagement, find out how often the sessions will occur. Some coaches only meet with clients monthly, even ad hoc. I have found that meeting weekly yields the greatest returns in terms of deep transformative change.

Personality fit. It's a good idea to meet with prospective coaches before engaging in an agreement. That way, you can ensure someone is a good personality fit for the employee.



Ultimately, leaders should integrate those three factors into the daily choices they make. With an executive coach's help, repeated refinements and clear goals will help companies track the progress of the coaching investment.

A team effort

Stronger leadership results in the ROI extending far beyond the individual level. The benefits of executive coaching will trickle down the organization to other employees and ultimately have a positive impact on the company's bottom line.

Think of a leader as an orchestra conductor. At the most basic level, the conductor keeps the orchestra in time and together. But a conductor also translates the composer's message. With the conductor's lead, the musicians can then create a unified vision of the music to play to the audience's delight.

Like a conductor, an executive is responsible for driving focused alignment and keeping their team in tune with each other to get the desired results. For example, a coach can work with a leader to be more effective at delegation or to better cultivate cross-functional relationships to develop and deliver operational excellence. But the impact doesn't stop at the leader's level. Now that the leader can improve performance and achieve sustainable results, they are in a better position to be able to pass along their knowledge to their direct reports.

Let's look at "Samir," a leader who has an issue with delegation. In working with a coach, he learns to avoid holding onto too many tasks and becoming a bottleneck in the chain of command. Once Samir learns to let go, other team members will develop and level up in their leadership because they receive stretch assignments for the first time. Perhaps they start attending higher-level meetings that they were not invited to before. Or maybe they become involved in cross-functional projects that only Samir previously handled. As he gives his team members more responsibility, they begin to grow, learn, and become more accountable under his direction.

When a team leader is working to drive more effective results, companies will start to see greater

ownership and accountability by every person on the team. There will be more clarity in what the expectations are, because everyone will understand their roles and responsibilities as well as the level of performance that is expected of them. Rather than having directive dumping of assignments on them, the direct reports will have development and coaching conversations with their leader.

That's a perfect example of how employers will see behavior change from the leader as well as every team member. And when companies have high-performing teams, they are more profitable.

Executive coaching builds leadership capacity that translates into an ROI in myriad ways.

Proof and rewards

Through coaching, an executive can become more of an orchestra conductor who is responsible for team-driven results rather than just their own personal results. Their new role becomes building and nurturing that high-performing team. Such a transition has a huge impact for the leader, team members, and the organization. It illustrates how executive coaching builds leadership capacity that translates into an ROI in myriad ways.

When you can provide proof of development efforts, employers will be able to attract, grow, and retain employees. And regardless of whether a company has an effective leader at the helm of a 10- or 1,000-person team, the benefits will be clear.

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What L&D Can Learn From Cross



BY BRIAN J. LANZA



The fitness company's strategies for instruction, engagement, and motivation can also apply to workplace training.

Fit

I love instructional design. And I really like CrossFit workouts. I use the verb *like* instead of *love* about CrossFit because, as I often lay in a pool of my own sweat, spread out on the floor from pure exhaustion upon completing the workout of the day, I often find myself asking: Why do I do this?

CrossFit's strength and conditioning program consists of a unique mixture of Olympic weightlifting, gymnastics, plyometrics, and calisthenics. It is not easy, not comfortable, not pleasant, and certainly not for the faint of heart. But it is so popular.

The reason, I believe, lies in what the company does right to attract and engage its audience. And as any talent development professional with a passion for adult learning would do, I sought to identify the characteristics that make CrossFit work in the health and fitness community with the hope of tying them to our profession in corporate L&D.

Three main layers

Like L&D, CrossFit is designed for adult learners (although there is now modified programming for younger members). Adults of all ages, shapes, and sizes who share a common goal of improving their overall health and fitness go to a Cross-



Fit gym seeking the knowledge, direction, and skills to do so. In return, the company provides a program of instruction that achieves that goal in a highly motivating and engaging way.

Does that concept sound familiar? The three main areas where I believe CrossFit programming excels are in preparation, execution, and engagement.

Preparation

Properly preparing an audience for your learning event is a crucial element in setting up participants for success. CrossFit realizes the importance of that initial step and the subsequent benefits to its members. Here are some ways that L&D can also benefit.

CrossFit lets participants know what to expect in advance of their class. Every night at 8 o'clock, CrossFit affiliates send their members the next day's workout of the day. It breaks down, in detail, what each item of the following day's routine will cover.

That helps members in several ways. For one, it provides insight into what they should expect in the upcoming class, which enables them to prepare accordingly. Will tomorrow's workout encompass a lot of running? If so, I better pack my running shoes. Will there be heavy lifting? I'll bring my weightlifting belt and wrist wraps.

Additionally, the advanced notice provides individuals the opportunity to practice a movement prior to executing it during class. I can prepare for class by watching a quick tutorial on YouTube or practicing the movement at home so that I can perform it better when it matters.

How L&D can borrow that approach: We need to be asking ourselves: What information can I provide to participants in advance of the training session that will help prepare them for success?

Are there new vocabulary terms or concepts, articles, instructional videos, or activities that do not require a trainer or subject matter expert to be present? If so, allow learners to complete those tasks on their own time to begin immersing themselves in the subject matter.

Also, training agendas are important. We should present to all participants a

detailed list of what they will be experiencing during the training program at least several days in advance of the scheduled session. Doing so accomplishes several goals:

- Learners begin to process the material prior to their training class, creating the important mental scaffolding required to store and recall new information.
- It is a time saver. Use the valuable time with participants to further discuss and explore topics as a group rather than waiting in silence while everyone reads the information on their own.
- It enables learners to ask any preliminary questions they may have, thus eliminating the need to do so in the classroom, again saving time.

CrossFit uses efficient time management. Classes are one hour long and will always start and end on time. Additionally, CrossFit plans class schedules around those of its members to maximize the opportunities to train.

How L&D can borrow that approach: We should respect our audience's time for each training session, whether in person or virtually, by starting and ending on time. It seems small, but doing so will have a big impact on learners.

We have asked them to give us an hour (sometimes less, sometime more) of their day, and they have put their jobs on hold for that period of time. As such, we are obligated to uphold our end of the agreement and maximize the time spent together. Be respectful of participants' time, and in return they will be respectful of ours.

Also, offer multiple sessions on multiple days and times (when possible) to further accommodate learners. Be aware of how your scheduling affects individuals who live in different time zones and countries or who otherwise have differing schedules.

Training/Instructional execution

By offering training in an open, supportive, and nonjudgmental way, CrossFit transforms members' knowledge, skill, and abilities via its instructional approach. The following techniques are how L&D can strive to do the same.

CrossFit offers an inclusive workout experience. Given that its members come in all ages, shapes, and sizes, how does the organization accommodate its classes to serve such a vast audience demographic? The answer is that it provides workout options that help meet the individual learners' needs at their current fitness level.

Every workout provides a programmed level of how a high-performing athlete should perform the movements. Also provided is a modified regimen that is of a lesser skill, weight, or rep scheme for individuals still improving their craft. Having that alternative option enables people at various levels to still participate together in class activities.

How L&D can borrow that approach: An essential element of good training design is knowing your audience. How learners will eventually use the information on the job must be a primary focus when you're designing instruction. For example, for a workplace sexual harassment course, consider how its implications vary for someone in a staff position versus someone in a leadership role with direct reports. With that understanding, we need to tailor our learning materials appropriately.

That may necessitate designing two distinct training experiences for each of those audiences. In e-learning, an effective technique is to create learner profiles that represent the various audience personas. Each profile, once selected, will then direct the learner down a path of instruction that most accurately reflects their role within the organization. Although both audiences for the sexual harassment training would need to know the laws and company policy on the subject, only the leadership profile would likely need training on how to properly handle difficult conversations with direct reports who disclose an incident of sexual harassment on the job.

Further, when learners need foundational information to complete an e-learning course, place it in an optional setting (such as via a button or hyperlink to supplemental material) separate from the primary course content. That design approach effectively provides the information for introductory-level learners who require it but does not impede higher-performing learners who already possess that knowledge from progressing in the course at their own pace.

Being aware of the differences in your audience and adjusting the instruction appropriately will enable multiple learners to sit in the same room while meeting each of them at their individual levels of need, resulting in a win-win scenario for all involved.

CrossFit effectively uses practice and repetition to achieve healthy habits and mastery of its various movements. With a diverse regimen of movements requiring high levels of strength, skill, agility, and stamina to complete, the programming effectively trains and conditions members over time. Individuals build upon their previous efforts for days, weeks, and months at a time.

How L&D can borrow that approach: Understand that true behavior and skill change takes time. Even the most talented instructional designers with the best of intentions ultimately fail when striving to achieve that goal from a one-and-done learning event. As psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus notes in his research of the spacing effect, “learning is greater when studying is spread out over time, as opposed to studying the same amount of content in a single session.”

You shouldn’t view training courses as solitary events but rather as continuous ones that require multiple touchpoints and layers of reinforcement wherein learners apply their new knowledge. The classroom experience is only one piece of the learning puzzle—the experience does not end simply because the learner has exited the learning module or training room. Instead ask: What can I do to now reinforce the new learning?

Is it possible to provide additional materials to learners that they can access via the

company intranet? Are there external resources that you can direct learners to for further exploration of the topic? How about partnering with managers on a series of activities or additional questions for learners to complete post-training and that can serve as talking points in their next one-on-one meeting? Can you use microlearning to create a reinforcement program that reintroduces the materials to learners and



Create a learning profile that tracks an individual’s knowledge and skill performances over time.

that provides scenarios related to the training topic for learners to solve?

In the same way that high-performing athletes need to put in the time to get the results they seek, we need to think in the same way about learners. Only by incorporating practice and repetition to learning events will we see the true skill and behavior changes we seek.

Program engagement

The elements that make a highly engaging and motivating workout environment are similar for training programs.

CrossFit uses constant variation of movements to keep its workout programming interesting. As a result, physical exercise turns into a fun and exciting event. One of the primary ways the organization accomplishes that is through diversity and variation of programming. Outside of the benchmark workouts, programming does not repeat. Even when a particular movement is a focus of a training cycle, there is always some small element that makes it different from what individuals were exposed to previously.

How L&D can borrow that approach: One of the best training experiences I was part of skillfully used the element of diversity in its instructional approach. Throughout the three-week, new-hire orientation program, the trainers used various methods to present their materials. The method kept learners “on their toes,” never fully knowing what would come next. That made the experience fun and interesting.

Consider what you could do to engage participants throughout your time together. Effective learner-centric approaches are to ask questions often of the audience and to include polls or questionnaires that elicit learner feedback. Seek to uncover participants’ on-the-job experiences and use them in scenarios that drive home important learning points. Plan small-group activities and then ask learners to present their ideas to the group. Adults bring a lifetime of experiences to the table that all participants can learn from; all we need to do is provide ample opportunities for them to do so.

With multiple authoring, animation, audio, video, and augmented and virtual

reality tools at our disposal, there are almost limitless options to mix up digital training experiences. A good rule of thumb in e-learning is to have learners take some type of action every two to three slides that provides options to how they consume the information. The key is to design the actions to be purposeful and to not include them just for interactivity’s sake.

CrossFit masterfully applies gamification, promoting healthy competition. There’s a workout challenge in every class. CrossFit times and measures all workouts and posts the results on a leaderboard for everyone to see. That gamified approach to working out pushes individuals to compete at a high level, often achieving personal results higher than they thought were possible.

How L&D can borrow that approach: Is there a creative way that you can include a scoring system in your course? One example I observed recently was assigning individual scores to learners based on how quickly they answered knowledge check questions during a live training session. That small, gamified element had attendees sitting up in their seats, anticipating each of the questions and competing with one another to see who could answer them correctly and most quickly.

If you’re leading a training event that consists of several hours or days of instruction, consider issuing awards for top performers based on various criteria. A small token such as a gift card would be well received and appreciated. If physical gifts are not an option due to budget constraints, a personal email to an employee’s direct line manager complimenting their efforts is a great way to reward learners. The effective use of healthy competition in the training design will go a long way in elevating participants’ engagement levels.

CrossFit provides a program for members to gauge their progress over time. Each person’s performance tracker enables them to view data of their fitness achievements and see how far they have progressed over time. When individuals achieve a personal record on a movement or workout of the day, they receive a digital badge on their profile acknowledging the accomplishment.

How L&D can borrow that approach: Learners taking time to review their personal learning journey can provide excellent opportunities for reflection.

Create a learning profile that tracks an individual’s knowledge and skill performances over time. If an employee has a goal to advance into leadership, could you add professional development credits or badges to their profile showcasing what they have completed? In a sales environment, could you pull data that shows an employee’s current performance versus that of previous months or years?

Depending on what the data reflects, give rewards and reinforcement for strong performers or create an appropriate solution to upskill low-performing employees. By reviewing data that reflects an employee’s performance over time, you can effectively assist them by providing the coaching and support required at the moment of need.

Tying it all together

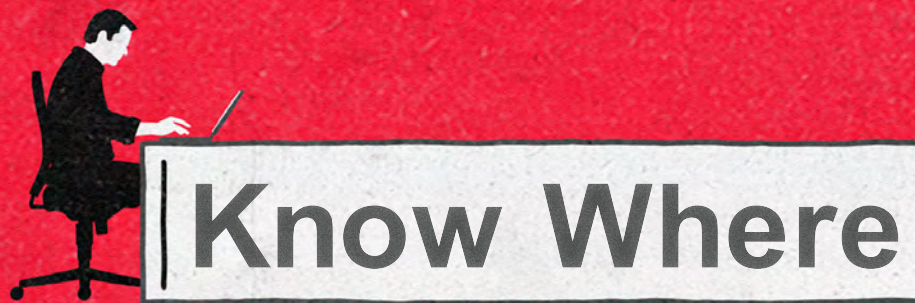
CrossFit is moving the dial in the physical fitness world via its efficient use of strategies that drive and reward human behavior. Simply put, when properly trained and motivated, people are capable of completing extraordinary acts.

We in L&D need to borrow those same techniques when working with adult learners in the workplace. Through proper preparation, execution, and engagement, we can motivate learners to view training as something they want to do. By doing so, we may become models of efficiency that will inspire new and creative approaches not yet realized.

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Instead of expecting learners to memorize everything, use conduit learning design, which leads them to quickly find what they need when they need it.

BY JAMIE MANUEL



“The group of reporters waited while an Edison question, ‘What is the speed of sound?’ was translated into German. Einstein’s answer was translated into English. ‘I don’t know offhand,’ he said. ‘I don’t carry information in my mind that’s readily available in books.’”

—Denis Brian, *Einstein: A Life*

to Go



Here's a present-day example that illustrates the point Albert Einstein made in 1921: I was at a music festival when the DJ played David Guetta's song *Titanium*. "This is Sia singing, right?" I asked.

"No, it's not. I don't know who it is, though," my fiancé replied. "Yeah, it's totally Sia," I insisted.

I'm not a huge music buff, so what authority did I have? Instantly, I took out my phone and searched "Titanium song" on Google because I couldn't not know. Sure enough, the search produced a result that said, "Titanium by David Guetta, ft. Sia."

Let's pause to recognize that a few amazing things happened there.

First—and maybe most important—I was right. Second, it highlights that learning is strongest when it's rooted in a moment of need, a concept that Bob Mosher and Conrad Gottfredson explain in their 5 Moments of Need framework. A person's will to learn intensifies when their brain is thirstiest for knowledge because there's something at stake.

More subtly, though, was the information and process to get to the precise answer I needed: making use of my smartphone. With access to a world of information in the palms of their hands, people no longer have to memorize and retain all the knowledge they encounter. Instead, they can outsource information storage until they need it. How then are talent development professionals accounting for that shift in our learning experiences?

Enter conduit learning, which is the process in which learners consume content based on:

- The breadth of key information
- The storage of information in a location that is predictably easy and quick to find
- The behaviors they need to access the information when they need it

A person's capacity to learn and recall information was so important that it was—and still is—tested daily in schools. Students crammed by committing as much information to short-term memory as humanly possible, hoping they recalled the information during the big exam.

But now that there are devices that store an endless supply of information, what is the value of learning solely to recall it all? How does having immediate and easy access to knowledge change the way we think about designing learning experiences? What does that ultimately mean for our learners?

Now don't get me wrong—I'm not suggesting that learners are free to forget all the material after we

introduce it to them. There is real value in retaining information and quickly recalling it. (That's how players get rich playing *Jeopardy!*) I'm also not suggesting that we abandon learning designed around the latest and greatest of what we've discovered about learning psychology.

Conduit learning design is additive. It fills a gap caused by evolutionary biology and the information-saturated world. Consider this: The rate and amount of information a person is expected to learn and retain to be productive is increasing at an astronomical rate. Meanwhile, the brain's capacity to store more information isn't keeping pace. Humans can't evolve fast enough.

So, how does learning evolve in a world where there's simultaneously more information that someone can absorb and the ability for them to instantly access it? When designing for conduit learning, consider four major shifts:

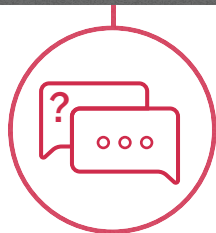
- Scaffolding—from all details up front to an outline that offers details when ready
- Mapping—from content comprehensiveness to topic-based mental maps
- Revisiting—from a static learning module to searchable content in a single, predictable location
- Assessing—from designing for knowledge checks to designing for knowledge finds

Scaffolding

A dense learning experience will result in learners not retaining all the content. To combat that, we lay out learning concepts and details to create a mental scaffolding—a broad understanding of how content connects to the learning objectives. However, learners frequently lose the finer details after consuming the content. We often justify those losses as part of the natural forgetting process and make up

Certified Designer Course Road Map

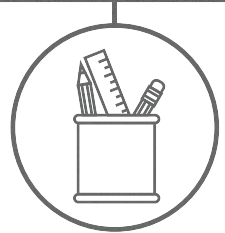
1. Preparation phase



2. Learning objectives



3. Iterative design



The road map displays the course's six units, with the first unit highlighted as a visual for learners.

for them via learning strategies such as repetition and reinforcement. Within the corporate learning sphere, implementing repetition and reinforcement strategies is difficult. Living in that reality, what needs to change?

For conduit learning, give fewer details up front and provide more focus and strength through leaner mental scaffolding. In other words, put more effort into the organization of and process for finding content rather than into the finer details. Design scaffolding that acts as a guide to learners at the moment of need and reduces the noise of less necessary information. In return, scaffolding signals to learners what content is most important and gives them a way to organize the information in their minds.

Many websites do scaffolding well. For example, take my company's site, salesforce.com. When visitors land on the homepage, they see the site's sections that the company believes are most important to its visitors: Products, Resources, Support, Company, COVID-19, and Salesforce+. When the mouse hovers over any of those sections, the webpage reveals additional scaffolding—but only when it's needed. If a visitor wants to learn more about Slack, then they would hover over "Products" and then click "Slack" when it pops up. The person may look at the Slack site to get the information they need but realize a few days later that they still have questions. Because of conduit learning and the website's intuitive scaffolding, the visitor knows right where to go.

Try this: Conduit design for scaffolding means you could use a pre-teach for keywords before the context: "I want to introduce you to three key acronyms. They will be more meaningful later." Calling out the three acronyms helps learners begin organizing the content in their minds, which provides them a structure for easy future retrieval.

Mapping

With learning content, we often get one opportunity to capture learners' attention. Despite our best efforts, we still often pack in every detail we want learners to know—even though our voice of reason tells us that there's no way one person can remember all of it. Or is there?

The ancient Greeks memorized hours-long poems with more than 15,000 lines by relying on a memory technique referred to as "the memory palace." It turns out that the human brain is especially good at remembering places. For example, take a moment to imagine your childhood bedroom. Chances are you have a pretty good idea where your bed, desk, or closet were no matter how long it's been.

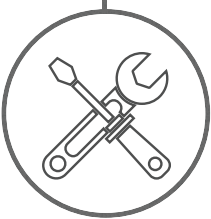
We can take advantage of place-based orientation by layering location maps onto the scaffolding. Said another way, the scaffolding acts as the way to organize the information while mapping provides a synchronous (or asynchronous) order to visit the information.

Try this: To experiment with mapping in conduit design, use infographics to associate resources or help highlight features with physical locations. It's best to make the infographic the only resource document and to have each component connected to either a physical or easily imagined virtual location.

Alternatively, create a visual map of contents rather than a list-based table of contents (see figure). The human brain isn't great at remembering lists, so instead use a visual course map or graphic opener to show learners what to expect and to give them another way to build association across the content's major themes.

The main idea around mapping is that learners rely on where they are looking rather than what information they seek.

4. Iterative development



5. Assessment



6. Milestone





Conduit learning design requires relentlessly user-friendly, user-centric ways to find information.

Revisiting

When learners finish a module or classroom experience, they rarely return to the content unless prompted. For conduit learning, intentionally create learning that doubles as a resource—build content made for learners to revisit at the moment of need.

To do so, first, the content needs to have a memorable name that is searchable. The behavior of searching and finding information at the moment of need is now ubiquitous, and we can make it work for us in learning design to decrease the cognitive load we place on learners. In other words, we can reverse engineer learning design—through both content and structure—knowing that learners are already learning and working that way. Make sure to apply the observations from search behavior—think keywords, unique identifiers, and embedded tags.

Second, host the content in a single, well-organized location that is easy for users to access and navigate. Steve Jobs wanted access to any app on the iPhone in two clicks. Googling a search term takes two clicks. Notice a pattern? Conduit learning design requires relentlessly user-friendly, user-centric ways to find information. And because learners experience that seamless user experience with other apps, such as Uber and Netflix, they now expect the same with learning design.

The emphasis for revisiting behaviors in conduit design is on the process: where learners go, how they seek information, and what they do with the information when they have it. Sending learners to one hosting location and making it easy for them to retrieve content doesn't happen in isolation. When you design experiences with details in a central location, learners get accustomed to using the system, enjoy the predictability, and make it a habit.

Try this: To take full advantage of the concept of revisiting in conduit design, decide on the one location where you will send all learners (and be disciplined about this hosting location) and then use a two-click scavenger hunt: Ask questions that require individuals to return to that single location to answer them. Once learners become confident that they can find the answers quickly in that location, they will use that behavior again and again because it's familiar and easy.

Assessing

We often look to the forgetting curve as an influence that informs how we design learning and reinforcement. There's a constant battle with forgetting as we help learners remember as much as they can over time.

Instead of assessing to check knowledge, assess for conduit learning. Design to test whether learners know where to go to find relevant information at the time of need. Encourage techniques such as using CTRL + F, or alternatively, design assessments as scaffolding.

When it comes to open-book exams, many adult learners still use a technique they learned in school: Read the questions first and then read the content to find the answers. What's subtly happening in those situations is that individuals are also learning where to go should they need that information again. That means we should build assessment questions that send learners to the most-important sections of the scaffolding and ask them about knowledge that they will surely need to apply later.

Try this: Make your end-of-course quiz about where things are instead of what things are. Use a fill-in-the-blank assessment that requires learners to concurrently put the answer in context and find the information quickly. As such, the assessment is practice for learners—they are practicing *Titanium* moments.

Back at the music festival, when I heard *Titanium*, I knew the quality and style of Sia's voice—through stable, existing knowledge—but lacked certainty in context, which caused a gap. I had the retained knowledge I needed (the name of the song), and I knew a reliable source (Google). Both made it possible for me to get the answer I wanted at the moment I wanted it.

Contrast that with having to memorize Guetta's entire album the first time I heard it and then expecting to retain that information. It sounds silly, but isn't that what we're repeatedly asking learners to do? It's as if we tell them, "Here, memorize all this content right away because at some point in time you may need it."

Perhaps you've been in a similar situation, simultaneously getting the answer you needed via the internet and experiencing the joy of be-

ing right after its validation. That simple but all-to-familiar shared experience opens up a world of possibilities. What if we could replicate those *Titanium* moments for learners again and again? What if our learning design results in greater information precision, empowering learners to search and find only the content most relevant to them? (And what if they end up remembering it forever?) What if conduit learning is exactly what we need to stimulate the next wave of cognitive efficiency?

There are a lot of questions but a shockingly easy way to get all the answers: Experiment with conduit learning design and see what unfolds.

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Conduit Learning Design in Action

At Salesforce, we wanted first-line sales leaders to play a more active role in their teams' enablement. That required creating different experiences for leaders, where they consume content customized for them and different from the content for individual contributors.

Leader Lens is an ongoing initiative we developed for leader learning. In exchange for less time in self-guided learning, we ask leaders to bring the learning from "screen to team" by running a reinforcing team activity. It has been a successful testing ground for some of the elements of conduit learning design.

Scaffolding. The Leader Lens toolkit follows a predictable and consistent structure using the acronym LEAD: learn, enable, analyze, and deliver. We use the LEAD structure to distill the most important information and organize it in a way that is easier for leaders to consume. It is impossible for us to expect leaders to know everything, but we want them to know where they can find the answers they need fast.

Revisiting. All Leader Lens courses follow the same taxonomy—for example: Leader Lens for Slack, Leader Lens for Dreamforce, and Leader Lens for Fast Start. The repetition of that naming convention makes tagging easy and searching simple.

In addition, we place all sales leader materials, from onboarding onwards, on our sales enablement platform. We want sales leaders to go to the platform like everyone goes to the internet. If sales leaders have a question or need a resource, they know exactly where to go. We reinforce that behavior with discipline.

Assessment. Do we think leaders are going to memorize the toolkit for knowledge-check assessments? Absolutely not. Instead, we use the assessment to reinforce the scaffolding. We created some tricky questions about the most important information and expect leaders to use the toolkit to find the answers to them. As learners complete the open-book test, they build a stronger mental map so they know where to go in the future.



How Remote Organizations Can Instill Thriving Workplace Cultures



FlexJobs, a fully virtual business since 2007, knows what it takes to maintain company culture for a remote workforce.

BY CAROL COCHRAN



In the years before the pandemic, remote work was running its own race, often to the side of larger workforce trends. The pace of remote work's growth for the past two decades has been slow and steady—but two years into a pandemic, it's clear that remote work is winning the race.

As a job search service focused on remote work since its founding 15 years ago, FlexJobs has had a front-row seat for remote work's seemingly overnight success, the roots of which began growing many years ago. One of the things we've been particularly focused on during that time, and perhaps even more so during the pandemic, is remote company culture.

Our leadership team is people focused, thoughtfully building programs and initiatives to support and extend the company culture out to the remote workforce. The culture is guided and aligned to the company's overall mission with intention and a sense of mindfulness. Those efforts have resulted in not only a company that is focused on a holistic approach to culture but also multiple years being named among the top 25 small-company cultures by *Entrepreneur* magazine and one of the best places to work by *Outside* magazine.

What is remote company culture?

An organization's culture, whether remote or otherwise, can be defined as how the people in the company work and work together to accomplish their tasks. Culture comprises a mission, attitudes, norms, behaviors, expectations, and overarching principles and values.

FlexJobs, for example, is focused on helping people find a better way to work through remote and flexible work, and we are guided by integrity, communica-

tion, and care. Those are the building blocks of our company culture. But that's only the beginning. As employers with remote workforces think more deeply about the culture they are intentionally or unintentionally creating, there are many opportunities to build strategy and process around culture—to weave the who, what, when, and where of the company's daily work with the why of it all.

Note that developing a remote company culture is somewhat different from building an in-person company culture. For decades, traditional in-person businesses used a set of cultural and managerial practices that relied on physical proximity as a big indicator of productivity and cultural health. Facial expressions, body language, the presence of someone physically at their desk; high fives, handshakes, pats on the back—with remote work, those indicators (regardless of whether each is a worthy indicator) are not available.

Therefore, to build a remote company culture, the focus must be on different practices: clear and open communication in all directions, a focus on results and the processes that get them, and trust.

Maintaining and strengthening remote culture

One of the most difficult aspects of remote work is the lack of spontaneous interactions among staff members who don't regularly work together. That spontaneity

builds small but meaningful connections—the ones that foster trust and make you think, “Hey, I know someone on that team” when the need arises to reach out for a work-related situation.

FlexJobs has tried to solve for that in several ways. One simple addition to our company-wide Slack channel is the platform’s Donut app, which pairs employees at random to schedule a virtual meetup and get to know each other. People from vastly different teams and career areas schedule 30-minute chats to talk about their career paths, interests, hobbies, and anything else that comes up in their casual conversations. The key is encouraging people to opt in to the app on Slack. One way we do that is by inviting staff who have used and enjoyed the app to share their stories in the general Slack channel to show others it’s a fun and worthwhile experience.

Related to that, the more you can have employees share their experiences, tips, and tricks with others, the more the company’s culture grows and evolves. Managers and leaders should regularly and enthusiastically encourage openness, trust, and the free sharing of information and ideas.

Our monthly all-staff Zoom calls are one way that the company shares information from the top down. CEO Sara Sutton, who co-hosts the calls, sees them as an opportunity to connect with everyone at the company. During the first few minutes, everyone is on video getting settled in. Meanwhile, Sutton makes a point to say hello to different team members, mostly individuals whom she otherwise wouldn’t interact with much on a daily basis. Those small but significant interactions are an important part of strengthening the underlying fabric of a remote team.

During each meeting, leaders share company information and news, discuss ideas and issues, and spotlight different teams and contributions. The meetings are also a time to celebrate birthdays and work anniversaries happening that month and to welcome new staff members.

Less-formal activities are additional ways for colleagues to interact. Our people and culture team (which houses the HR function) organizes virtual lunches, Zoom trivia events, and other casual get-togethers. During those events, we use breakout rooms to help smaller groups of employees come together. That helps individuals develop stronger connections with each other.

Aside from live virtual meetings, we use Yammer as an asynchronous way for team members to connect around a virtual watercooler of sorts. We use it with

intention in a variety of ways to engage staff. For example, we pose a Question of the Week such as:

- What was the first record or CD you ever bought?
- Coffee or tea?
- How many states have you been to?
- Yoga or running?

Those simple prompts garner lively responses every time, and the replies illustrate what different employees have in common with others from across the company (and encourage fun debates when they differ).

We also have used Yammer to create groups for connection over shared interests—for instance, pet corner, book club, crafts, cooking, exercise, parenting, and health and wellness.

It’s important to encourage such discussions to take place. Don’t underestimate the value of giving employees the opportunity to see both what they have in common and how they are different. It all goes toward reinforcing trust and strengthening relationships. Sometimes workers bond over creamy versus crunchy peanut butter or make a connection based on the commonality of caring for a parent in their final stage of life. In a remote company, it’s more paramount to make spaces for such bonds to develop—and to repeat the process over and over.

Building culture through onboarding

A strong virtual onboarding program can also contribute to a positive company culture. As with in-person onboarding, a disorganized process can leave a lasting bad impression on new employees. We have found that two of the most important aspects of onboarding remote workers are communication and time.

Open and regular communication from day one is vital to successful remote worker onboarding. Managers should have three critical communication objectives when onboarding a new employee:

- Use a combination of communication methods.
- Explain how the team uses each of the communication methods.
- Share their own communication preferences and ask the new hire how they prefer to communicate.

Communication must be both personal and professional. In addition to making sure a new hire learns how to operate in their job, managers should want to get to know their new team member as a whole person with a big life outside of work and enable them to get to know their new team in that way.

Giving new hires the time to get adjusted to working remotely on the team and setting clear

time expectations is another big piece of successfully onboarding remote employees. FlexJobs workers are largely able to set their own schedules each day. In that type of environment, make it clear to new hires what they should be spending their time on, for how long, how often, and when so that they know how to structure their new schedules. Have new employees discuss schedule ideas with seasoned staff so they learn best practices and what works well.

Typically, each FlexJobs manager works with their team to create a training outline that details the overall training process and what the new hire should be focusing on each day. An essential piece of that is giving the individuals plenty of time to digest all the new things they're learning. Managers should schedule time to talk to their new hires about each training piece and help them gain clarity where they're confused or learn how everything fits together.

Finally, introduce new staff to and immerse them in other parts of the company. In remote work, it can be easy for employees to stay heads-down and remain siloed in their part of the company. To combat that, make sure new remote workers get to interact with staff from other teams, both related and unrelated to their day-to-day work. For example, FlexJobs assigns new team members a buddy—an employee in a different part of the company—who can show them the ropes and answer their questions about the organization. In many cases, buddies have become strong connections long into a new person's tenure.

Best practices for leadership and managers

Remember that remote leadership requires more intention than in-person leadership. Great cultures and thriving employees do not happen by accident.

Day to day, managers and company leaders are central to imparting a remote company's culture. They should devote regular time to keeping their fingers on the team's pulse, actively exploring opportunities to engage them in meaningful work and discussions about work, and demonstrating the value they bring to the company.

Just as with on-site companies, each team in a remote company develops its own culture based on its shared professional focus, values, and needs. Team-level managers at FlexJobs foster strong cultures in different ways. For example, there's a lot of common ground in the work our career coaching and client services teams do. Those teams' man-

agers held a cross-team get-to-know-you meeting to create bonds, share knowledge, and brainstorm ways to solve shared pain points.

Afterward, individuals from both teams said they were thrilled to have the chance to connect more deeply with the other team's members. Moving forward, the managers plan to hold similar meetings once or twice a year.

For remote company cultures to work every day, managers should lead by example every day. Our team managers make a point to do small things such as saying good morning and goodnight to their teams on Slack; asking about people's lives outside of work; sharing about their own lives; and posting pictures of their kids, pets, hobbies, messy home offices, and funny memes. It's easy to get stuck in work mode, especially for managers with multiple big responsibilities. But those small, daily interactions are vital to healthy remote team cultures.

FlexJobs routinely refines and improves methods to boost engagement, productivity, and happiness. Feedback and input from team-level managers are especially helpful in these fluid endeavors because employees in that position can more easily see what works well and what doesn't than senior-level managers.

Policies and guidelines

Companies should have some structure around any guidelines they put in place so that those guidelines will be effective. Having flexible work options doesn't mean it's a free-for-all. Everyone will feel more confident when there are guardrails and guidelines to go by.

One place to start is in developing policies around the platforms employees should use for different types of communication. FlexJobs managers have created guidelines for communication norms within teams and across the company. For instance, Slack may be the best place for teams to casually chat throughout the day, but email is better for questions that require some thought before responding.

Further, we have a general policy that if an email chain goes back and forth more than three times without getting closer to clarity or a solution, the staffers involved should stop and think: Would this be more productive as a voice conversation? Synchronous communication can help employees get in sync.

While remote work is overall a more productive, focused way to work, we are human and mistakes will happen. Company-wide, staff talk regularly about assuming "mistake rather than malice," which means that employees start with the assumption that someone did their best and tried to do the right thing.

Starting with that assumption makes it easier for staff to address the issue proactively, gain buy-in from everyone involved about the best path forward, have managers check in regularly as the improvements proceed, and continue to use proactive communication to reinforce the new approach. One way to open difficult conversations is with something such as “Our goal for this meeting is to find a good solution” so that the focus is on the problem, not the person.

It takes a reasonable level of empathy to build a healthy workplace culture remotely, as well as a certain amount of humility and vulnerability. Nobody will get it right 100 percent of the time. Starting from a place of trust, plus acknowledging difficulties and being open to feedback, is required of leaders and managers who aspire to build successful remote work cultures over the long term.

Culture is a living, breathing entity

Perhaps the greatest strength of remote workforces is their understanding that work and life are not mutually exclusive. Work and personal responsibilities, interests, and goals will always be vying for similar time and attention, but when those things happen in the same space, the tension between those aspects of people’s lives becomes more obvious. And throughout the pandemic, hundreds of millions more professionals have felt that push and pull acutely in their daily lives.

FlexJobs is a workplace where staffers feel empowered to arrange their daily lives in a way that makes

sense to them. The company gives team members control and freedom in when, where, and how they work, which helps everyone determine the best ways to make their work lives and personal lives coexist more peacefully. And that control and freedom exists within a cultural framework that supports and promotes proactive communication—starting with trust—and regular reflection and improvement, from the time they interview for a position throughout their life cycle as a team member.

Managers need to appreciate the fact that what works to grow a healthy culture is ever-changing. What may be effective for a period of time can change, so regularly reconsidering how things are working is important. Culture is not stagnant but a living, breathing part of the company that needs steady attention.

The future of work involves remote workers, and workplace culture must reflect that trend. Healthy remote companies proactively build culture in a virtual environment so employees can feel supported and do their best work.

Carol Cochran is vice president of people and culture at FlexJobs; carol@flexjobs.com.

**Great cultures
and thriving
employees do
not happen by
accident.**



Learning Technologies

Technology of all forms continues to be in high demand, and many suppliers have adapted their products and services accordingly to fulfill the wide range of talent development professionals' needs. Highlighted here are some examples of technology tools, strategies, and benefits.

Learning has undergone a radical transformation in recent years with innovations in technology. Leafing through binders has been replaced by interactive e-learning platforms. The modern LMS draws inspiration from yesteryear's challenges, advances, and breakthroughs. Today's learner witnesses revolutionary changes in the LMS with emerging technologies. Forty percent of Fortune 500 companies use LMSs for competitive advantage. It's estimated that the global e-learning market will surpass \$370 billion by 2026 (Statista 2020).

Exclusive features of the modern

LMS. Unlike the traditional LMS, today's LMS is a comprehensive learning platform that blends the power of an LMS with collaborative tools. A good LMS will:

- Deliver diverse content in different formats to give learners complete control over what and where they learn.

- Add a social learning element with peers.
- Drive learner motivation through gamification and leaderboards.
- Facilitate on-the-go learning with instant access to the required content.

Top LMS trends for 2022:

1. Digital content in all formats (e-books, videos, audiobooks)
2. Hands-on learning with discussion, chat support, and gamification
3. Big data analytics tools to scrutinize hidden templates, market trends, correlations, and user preferences
4. Upgrading to metaverse for immersive learning by visualizing and imagining concepts
5. Flexibility of learning

gyrus.com



A New Era of Training

One of the many insights that science has revealed since Galileo is that the world can't be explained through one's intuition. After all, it sure looks like the sun makes a daily revolution around our Earth. It's the same with training and learning. The best methods that make training stick aren't those that intuitively occur to us. The best methods are those that have been found to work through the experimental methods of science. A modern learning platform should utilize them to the fullest extent possible.

In most organizations, learning matters because the workforce is the most expensive and indispensable component of the business. But organizations often fail to realize that truth and continue to train with legacy approaches that are not nearly as effective as techniques derived from science.

Learning and memory happen in the brain. But unlike a video recorder, the human brain was designed by the evolutionary force of natural selection to aid in survival and reproduction. It learns and remembers remarkably well under some circumstances and barely at all under others. Here are a few examples among the 20 or so core drivers of learning and memory.

- Emotion, which evolved to aid in survival, causes focused attention—a fundamental mental state driving memory formation. The emotion aroused by movies and video games is a prime example.
- Uncertainty—the feeling of risk or reward waiting out there in the future—causes curiosity, motivating a learner to seek out more information about a topic.
- Personalization is made possible through computing power that can track the knowledge state of every individual and adapt appropriately. Qualities such as a learner's misinformation, uncertainty, struggle, realism,

and motivation can instantaneously allow for the computation of learning content that's in concert with the learner's needs.

- Metacognition is the mental elaboration creating the internal sensation of confidence in one's knowledge, often called "the feeling of knowing."
- Desirable difficulties are counterintuitive techniques that make learning seem strenuous but are shown experimentally to pay considerable performance dividends. Examples are spacing, interleaving, and retrieval practice. All three techniques are perceived by the learner to be of minimal value; nevertheless, the data shows that they are radically effective.

The data generated by such a system is a boon for training professionals. The issues hidden away in a learner's mind can now be seen in reports showing individual and

group problems that need personal coaching. Trainers can see which topics are not landing. They can discover the areas where people are likely to operate with confidently held misinformation, so dangerous because confidence is the mental precursor to behavior in the world. Trainers can see who came to training already knowledgeable and who struggled to learn.

We now live in a new era of learning and training. It's here because of cognitive science, and it represents an opportunity for every motivated training professional. A modern learning platform can help trainers build people who work at the peak of their human potential, achieving new heights of performance and productivity.

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A More Engaging Way Forward

The rapid expansion of the remote workforce over the past two years has pushed learning technologies into the spotlight, flaws and all. But that added scrutiny has given training and development professionals invaluable feedback. With the demand for remote training and development increasing at a staggering pace and learners suffering from online learning fatigue, it's become more important than ever to carefully consider the best uses of the learning technology toolset. Fortunately, the versatility of that toolset combined with innovation in the field of learning and development has helped us keep pace with changing demands.

Interactive E-Learning

L&D professionals are always looking for new ways to tailor e-learning experiences to boost interest and provide the right amount of scaffolding. Customer demand for more bite-size learning objects coupled with new developments in interaction types and feedback techniques have helped us break through digital training burnout and create courses with more frequent opportunities for meaningful engagement.

Video

Changes in established technologies like video have given L&D professionals the ability to produce more targeted and engaging messages. Using the right blend of game engine-driven virtual production, 360 environments, live action, 3D animation, and 2D motion graphics, designers can extend the horizon of creative and immersive videos, taking corporate learning audiences to multiple globe-spanning locations in a single day.

Virtual/Augmented Reality

The virtual/augmented reality sphere has undergone expansive growth, with



many large organizations finding the benefits of stronger learning experiences, lower long-term cost, and higher retention rates too good to pass up. Because VR offers increased sensory engagement, it promotes empathy and provides effective training in high-stress or potentially dangerous situations as well as more nuanced soft skill scenarios. From experiences that help learners safely practice docking an aircraft jet bridge to those that offer practice with difficult HR conversations, the value of good VR training lies in the lasting impact of experiential learning.

Web3D

With the increased need for learners to access realistic simulations from their phones, tablets, or computers, expanded Web3D offerings can help learners seamlessly transition from in-person experiences to virtual ones. This technology allows even the smallest screens to serve as portals to immersive environments that allow learners to interact and explore.

The right blend of learning technologies helps learners forge a deeper understanding of subject matter and create lasting knowledge transfer. The increasing significance of learning technologies in training and development is a sustained shift that will endure beyond the temporary, albeit lengthy, effects of the pandemic.

As L&D professionals, we know technology doesn't drive the story, but when the circumstances are right, we can use it to tell the story more effectively. And now that the doors to XR and the metaverse are open, there will soon be even more ways to let users define and shape their own learning experiences. At Miller Creative, we're looking forward to the opportunities that lie ahead for our industry to hone and advance the use of these learning technologies thoughtfully, responsibly, and effectively.

MillerCreative.com



Leverage Your Skills for a Career Shift

Understand how your capabilities are transferable to other roles.

BY NIKKI O'KEEFFE

Are you one of the people thinking about changing jobs as part of the Great Resignation? Perhaps you've had a solid run in your current role, yet it feels like the time to try out a different one.

Working as a senior training facilitator is something I adore and am passionate about, but like all accidental trainers, I didn't start my career in the talent development field. I know what it's like to be drawn, almost like a magnet, to another role and industry.

If I stayed in the career lanes for which I received my degree, I'd probably still be in the counseling space or forming health and wellness initiatives at organizations while teaching fitness classes for fun. You're probably thinking the transition from either one of those fields to talent development seems like an immense, almost impossible, move. But you can transfer many skills you use in one industry and role to another profession if you think about it creatively.

You may already have many of the capabilities necessary to close the space between you and your dream job. However, before making a move, do your research and go in with your eyes wide open.

Examine before you shift

You may have an urge to explore another position, but do you know what your life would be like in that role? It's easy to think that if you landed your dream job, everything else would fall into place. But what if it's not as rewarding as it looks from the outside? Are the hours longer than expected? Are the duties more administrative than you anticipated? Or perhaps there's a lot of red tape that goes with the role, and you would rather not deal with more bureaucracy than you already deal with at your current job.

As a first step, find out what the core skills and competencies are for the role you're considering. Some new trainers, for example, never thought they would have to confidently instruct on content topics that they were rather uncomfortable with, such as financial awareness training when their background is in fine arts. That's why I cannot overstate the research and preparation piece.

When you are observing someone doing a job, it can look effortless. It appears seamless because that person has put a lot of hard work into becoming confident in their job tasks. As such, make sure you have a clear understanding of what you're getting into. The grass isn't always greener on the other side—then again, what if it is?

4

Questions to Ask a Professional in the Field to Which You Aspire

1

What are the greatest challenges with this role that you didn't envision when you first started?



Gaining Skills for the Next Step

As you do your homework to potentially make a career leap, you're likely to find you have many transferable skills. The other side of the coin is that you may discover that you have skill deficiencies. You may even think that your deficiency is too big to overcome.

Don't let those areas of growth stop you from moving forward. Many methods exist to develop and grow ahead of your next professional chapter. Take a writing class, watch a TED Talk, download a language app, listen to a tech podcast, go to a diversity conference, or perhaps volunteer to help plan an event at a local nonprofit.

Another powerful way to gain the skills needed for your next role is by watching others who do an outstanding job in their positions. When you do so, you will likely start to unconsciously emulate some of their techniques. If you're thinking your career shift will be long term, it makes sense to take every step you can to grow and upskill.

Finding out the good, bad, and ugly about the role that right now is the object of your affection is the necessary external work. If after that you're still interested in moving forward, it's time for introspection.

Take stock of your skills

Before entering training and development, I counseled international students, worked as a neuropsychology technician, and served as a software implementation project manager. I continue to lead fitness classes on the side. Many of the skills I applied in each of those roles no doubt play a part in what I do today.

For a counselor, communication is key to successfully working with challenging individuals who may have problems or concerns. Patience and active listening are also a must. Those skills come into play when facilitating in the virtual classroom where I must hear cues from learners. What feedback can I gather from the questions they ask and the challenges they raise? Then I must figure out how I can use that information to best support them. That is quite similar to the skill set I used to navigate international students' challenges.

Likewise, there are similarities between what facilitators and fitness instructors do. When I'm doing the latter, I cue folks on what actions to take and inform them about the various muscles. That requires preparation and thinking ahead. In the corporate classroom, I must plan the activities that I want to do, consider the audience's experience level, and provide enough instruction for the class to remain buzzed with energy without getting chaotic—just like in the fitness studio. Even though those jobs are completely different,

Close the space between you and your dream job.

similar skill sets apply: preparation, communication, empathy, and feedback.

What if you're a project manager and your role is to ensure on-time and on-budget systems implementation to meet customer expectations? In that role, you listen to various vendors' concerns, delegate tasks, follow up, and research accordingly. Those skills are all relatable and transferable to being a learning content designer and developer. In that role, you'll need to create and implement learning programs on deadline and within budget constraints and manage stakeholder concerns and feedback, all while ensuring quality products that produce learning transfer.

As you plan your career shift, draw a Venn diagram with all the skills you've gained from previous jobs, through volunteer work, and even from your hobbies. In the center of the diagram will be the skills that you've already perfected in other capacities and that you can use in the next chapter of your career.

Use your network

A good friend recently shared that she was frustrated and feeling stuck in her accounting role and

2

What about this role brings you the most joy?

3

What personality traits and skill set works best in this role?

wanted to break into talent development and become an instructional designer. She had already done some self-work and recently completed an instructional design course. I began coaching her to push her thinking out of the box, asking her questions such as: Whom have you reached out to as a mentor in this field? What conversations can you sit in on to listen and learn more? What exactly do instructional designers do and what skills do you already have that align with those roles? What projects or stretch assignments can you work on in your current role or as part of a hobby to expand your skill set?

Sure enough, an opportunity came up to demonstrate her value and she messaged me to say, “Help, I’ve never done a needs assessment, and it is a requirement for the instructional designer job posting.” I replied: “Yes, you have.” Whenever she had a problem to solve at work and she broke down the necessary steps to get to the desired result, she was, in essence, conducting a needs assessment.

Sometimes a conversation with a friend, mentor, or colleague is a way to start the introspection process and unpack your skill set. Go beyond your resume and think back to what others have said about you. Do they mention your fine attention to detail? Your ability to solve problems? Or your creative nature? Alternatively, you can have that honest conversation with yourself to discover your transferable skills, which are the bridge between where you are now and where you ultimately want to go.



Preparing for the pivot

Regardless of what industry you’re considering, there’s probably a variety of roles in that field you could take on with your existing skill set. However, someone once told me that the best place to start looking for your next position is within your current job.

A big part of succeeding in a career shift is helping hiring managers connect how you can apply your transferable skills to your next role. Maybe you know the e-learning software Articulate Storyline but aren’t familiar with Captivate, which is a requirement for the position you aspire to attain. Those authoring tools are similar, so when the hiring manager asks about e-learning tools, you can say something such as, “I learned Articulate Storyline on my own and took on several stretch assignments at my current role to practice those skills. That’s the reason I’m confident that I’ll jump into this new tool in the same way.”

After several disparate roles, I got my chance to apply for a newly created trainer position. As fate would have it, I ended up interviewing for the job when I was in the early hours of labor with my first child—I strongly believed that it was my opportunity to move into the role I desired. The interview was at 11 a.m., and I had my baby at 2 p.m. the same day. All that to say, when you’re passionate about something, you’ll do some radical things to make it happen. I’ve now been in training and development for nearly 10 years and continue to leverage the skills from my previous roles to this day.

Nikki O’Keeffe is a senior facilitator for ATD; nokeeffe@td.org.

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If you could remove one task from this role, what would it be and why?



Lead With Confidence

The Successful Manager: Practical Approaches for Building and Leading High-Performance Teams

By James Potter and Mike Kavanagh,
Potter Consulting, 209 pp., \$18.99

REVIEWED BY DENISE HICKEN

It happens so often: A high performer is promoted to a managerial position only to struggle with the realities that come with leadership. While there are many books on management, Potter and Kavanagh bring a fresh approach and a in-depth and broad selection of topics.

They invite readers on an educational journey to become a top-tier manager. They note that this journey is the number 1 professional goal for those who manage teams, no matter whether they are a novice manager or a seasoned veteran. The authors also explain why it's important for a manager to spend a large amount of time engaging with people beyond their team. The explanation they give is likely to stand out as an aha moment for many readers.

The book progresses through topics such as goal setting and prioritization to tailoring your management style by managing through a crisis. Novice managers can consider the book a primer; veteran managers will find it refreshing and applicable to their responsibilities. The points Potter and Kavanagh make regarding giving feedback will cause any supervisor to pause and examine their current method.

Of note, the authors' leadership knowledge is based on their professional experiences. Potter's

background includes working closely with more than 100 organizations to accelerate corporate growth. He founded two companies and has worked in large companies such as General Electric and NBCUniversal. Kavanagh has worked as a C-level advisor, led large companies, and coached high performers.

The two weave in anecdotes from their significant experiences, such as how a CEO artfully empowers employees when they are in error, avoiding the sandwich approach of interjecting negative feedback between positive feedback. Potter and Kavanagh offer sage insights to guide readers with practical examples of what managers will likely face at some point during their career as well as suggestions for professional growth. Rather than providing readers with a to-do list, the authors assume the role of mentors, providing advice and prompting readers to put the information into action. That approach makes this book an interesting, mentally interactive read.

Denise Hicken, CPTD, is a senior learning consultant for Atrium Health Floyd; denise.hicken@atriumhealth.org.



Foster Inclusion and Belonging by Providing Equitable Access to Opportunities

What kind of culture would flourish if *every* member of your organization felt valued and supported? How would engagement, retention, and productivity improve if each individual was told that their contributions matter, and the company was committed to investing in their growth and development?

For organizations looking to take concrete actions to improve inclusion and belonging and elevate their commitments to creating equitable workplaces, democratizing access to learning and development must become a priority.

Move Beyond Selective Development to Unlock Your Organization's Full Potential

In the past, organizations have focused mainly on developing only a small segment of employees: those deemed “high potential” or already occupying senior leadership roles. But with the COVID pandemic and the rise of remote work and virtual capabilities, today's talent expects more egalitarian access to development opportunities—and the organizations that provide those opportunities can stand out from the crowd in the competition to recruit and retain the best.

An equitable investment in *all employees* not only helps to leverage talent, but it also signals to each employee that they are relevant and that their contributions matter. Rather than feeling *excluded* from the ranks of high potentials, they'll instead feel *included* in an organizational mission and vision that's larger than themselves.

There are many benefits to the feeling of belonging, and the field of neuroscience has given us a window into the value it can provide in the workplace. Neurologically belonging can improve the ability to reach higher-order

thinking skills like logical analysis and innovation—skills necessary to adapt to new challenges and increasingly diverse work environments.

Democratizing leadership development—rather than rewarding a small segment of employees—will not only allow you to improve performance at scale, but it will also boost your retention and engagement levels.

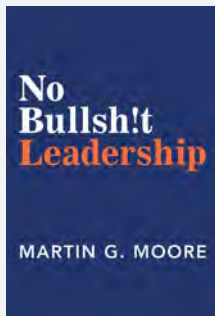
Drive an Inclusive Culture of Learning with Scalable Solutions

Flexible development options can help you broaden access to learning for every member of your organization, across leader levels and through every stage of their career journeys. And with the right partner, you can meet the increased demand for training and development, regardless of your L&D bandwidth.

Turnkey licensing solutions such as CCL Passport™ allow organizations to substantially enhance their level of leadership capability by providing world-class content and flexible delivery methods. CCL Passport™ can power your in-house leadership development initiatives through unlimited use of our content, informed by over 50 years of research and industry experience. Our industry-leading experts will also train your internal facilitators, enabling the same transformational leadership development that we deliver to our clients worldwide.

Show each of your employees that your organization values their contributions and believes in their capacity for growth. With an inclusive culture of learning and development, you can foster individual belonging and unlock collective potential.

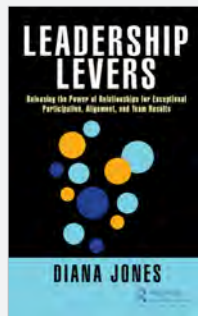
Learn more about democratizing and scaling leadership development at your diverse organization today: ccl.org/passport



No Bullsh!t Leadership

Martin G. Moore
RosettaBooks,
292 pp., \$26.99

Moore is a college dropout who worked his way up to the executive office. When he writes, “The higher up you go, the more impactful your decisions become,” that advice stems from his firsthand experience. Through this book, Moore relays straightforward leadership principles to those looking to fine-tune their skills. The book’s nine chapters are dedicated to core leadership development topics, which range from handling conflict and building resilience to decision making and driving accountability. Moore’s advice is timely and includes discussions on how readers can communicate with certainty during uncertain times and how to master ambiguity.



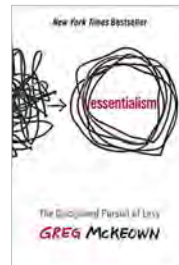
Leadership Levers: Releasing the Power of Relationships for Exceptional Participation, Alignment, and Team Results

Diana Jones
Routledge, 204 pp.,
\$29.95

Effective leadership is not about the title you hold—it’s about building positive relationships. That’s what Jones, a sociometrist and leadership advisor, explains to readers. She contends that only when leaders are intentional about relationship building can they unleash the power of their teams. In the book, Jones dives into topics that contribute to positive relationships, such as collaboration and trust, and provides practical advice regarding situations leaders face every day. For leaders interested in changing their team’s dynamics for the better, Jones explains forthrightly how to do so by conquering the levers of leadership.

FROM OUR AUTHORS

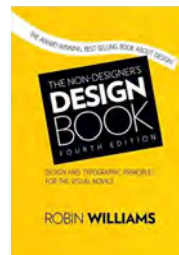
What’s on Your Bookshelf?



“If you don’t prioritize your life, someone else will.”

Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less by Greg McKeown

Learning to approach life from an essentialism mindset has made a really positive impact on both my professional and personal lives. —Carol Cochran



The Non-Designer's Design Book: Design and Typographic Principles for the Visual Novice by Robin Williams

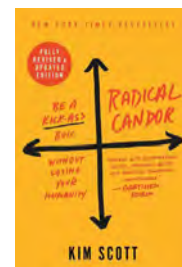
While revisiting *Design for How People Learn* by Julie Dirksen, I came across this gem, which Dirksen recommended for training professionals seeking a crash course in graphic design. Wonderfully written and illustrated, this book is one you’ll want to add to your instructional design tool belt. It helps provide better insight into the four key elements of graphic design as well as answers why certain visual layouts look better than others. This resource will help any nondesigners take their visual designs, in any medium, to the next level. —Brian J. Lanza

“There is a virtuous cycle between your responsibilities and your relationships.”

Radical Candor: Be a Kick-Ass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity by Kim Scott

Scott offers new ways of thinking about the importance of being honest and forthcoming in a way that preserves the important relationships at work.

—Joelle K. Jay



Build a Culture of Learning Within Your Team

The biggest barrier to creating a learning culture? Lack of time for learning. According to ATD research, organizations that allow employees to use paid work time for learning are more likely to be high performers.

ATD Enterprise Solutions offers you a way to ensure your organization is making learning a priority and part of the culture. Connect with us for a complimentary needs assessment to determine which customizable approach is right for you.

Visit us at td.org/enterprise-solutions to learn more.



First, Do No Harm

The tenets of patient-centered interviewing can help leaders both inside and outside the healthcare industry exhibit empathy.

BY CHARLES
CHARMAN

Healthcare providers have been aware of the significance of empathy going as far back as Hippocrates, who advised: “Cure sometimes, treat often, comfort always.” Higher clinician empathy scores are associated with improved patient outcomes across a diverse group of measures, including reduced patient anxiety and emotional distress, fewer thoughts of litigation among patients, and improved quality metrics in patients with diabetes.

But positive outcomes resulting from empathy aren’t limited to the healthcare industry. They can likewise result from leaders in non-healthcare settings exhibiting empathy. So why not adapt the technique that has proved successful for clinicians to cultivate empathy—patient-centered interviewing (PCI)—as a way for leaders in other industries to bring empathy into their workplaces?

What it is

To make a diagnosis, clinicians traditionally learn to ask patients pointed questions about their symptoms. However, that strategy often leaves patients feeling as if they are being interrogated. In contrast, when using PCI principles, clinicians ask open-ended questions that enable patients to take control of their disease narrative. So, instead of seemingly interrogating patients, clinicians are facilitating a conversation with the patients regarding their medical issues.

Research examining PCI techniques reveals that their use results in improved patient sat-

isfaction, understanding, and adherence to prescribed treatments. Using similar techniques, nonhealthcare leaders can harness the power of empathy to increase employee engagement, retention, satisfaction, and performance.

How it works

The dynamics of the manager-employee relationship are similar to those of the clinician-patient relationship. Both are based on a difference in power balance that may trigger direct reports or patients to hold back information that their manager or clinician may find valuable.

In his *Inc.* article, Marcel Schwantes writes that “about one third of surveyed employees are not comfortable advocating for cultural changes within their organization. Furthermore, 1 in 4 don’t feel comfortable raising ethical concerns.” In addition, employees may feel judged by their manager when discussing issues around performance and behavior.

But when leaders suspend judgment through the techniques used in PCI, employees feel acknowledged and heard. That aligns with psychologist Carl Rogers’ definition of empathy: responding to their world with “unconditional positive regard” and respect. In that way, PCI techniques help create conditions of safety, building trust between managers and their employees.

Guidelines

Through PCI training, leaders in medicine have come to understand that empathy is not sim-



CHECKLIST Preparing for Tough Conversations



Minimize distractions to ensure that you are fully present in the moment.



Examine your thoughts and feelings about the employee and the conversation. Set aside any hidden agendas you uncover.

ply a matter of putting themselves in patients' shoes. Moreover, their experience with cultivating empathy has taught them that it takes skill and practice. Managers in all industries can demonstrate empathy with their employees by exhibiting the following behaviors, which derive from PCI techniques.

Before engaging in what may be a high-stakes conversation or tough employee-manager talk, managers must remember that it's about the employee, not them. During the dialogue, people leaders should commit to putting their own thoughts, conclusions, and judgments on hold. Likewise, they should avoid attaching labels or judgments to specific behaviors or actions. Doing so will help cultivate an attitude of open inquiry.

Asking open-ended questions is key to the PCI technique. Because such questions cannot result in a yes or no response, they require a greater degree of thinking and reflection for the respondent. Inviting employees in an open and nonjudgmental way to reflect helps them to feel heard and may elicit a more involved response. "I am curious why ...," "Help me to understand ...," and "Tell me about ..." are great starts to open-ended questions.

Given that the employee will need a bit of time to think and reflect to respond to such questions, managers should allow for silence during the conversation. Silence is inherently uncomfortable, and it is always tempting to fill gaps in conversations—but resist the temptation. The silence encourages employees to continue talking and shows that you, as their manager, are interested in what they have to say. However, silence can be overdone. Three to four seconds of silence is a reasonable amount of time while not being perceived as awkward or threatening.

Despite my best intentions, I occasionally lose my way in these discussions. As soon as I sense the conversation may be going off the rails, I stop and remember the mantra: "Their

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open silence." That phrase reminds me of the PCI principles: It's about them, ask open-ended questions, and permit silence. Using PCI also provides me with a moment's pause to make sure I keep my emotions in check.

The skills needed to guide conversations using PCI techniques are not intuitive and require practice. Thus, managers should allow themselves some grace as they learn and apply the new strategies.

Results

A growing body of evidence from outside the healthcare realm shows that increasing empathy in work settings favorably affects employee productivity and wellness. For example, the 2021 EY Empathy in Business Survey found that 90 percent of employees feel that empathic leadership is better leadership and leads to positive change in the workplace. Furthermore, more than 80 percent of the respondents reported that mutual empathy between leaders and employees significantly increases productivity, creativity, efficiency, innovation, and company revenue while decreasing staff turnover.

Leaders in the medical field will not be surprised by those results because they are consistent with the improved patient outcomes associated with increased provider empathy that more than a decade of research in this area has revealed. PCI techniques and the associated effects are not only translatable to the business environment but beneficial to it as well.

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Make sure you are other-focused; suspend your judgments and biases about the employee and the circumstances.



Remember that your goal is to gain information and build rapport.



Microlearning is beneficial to keeping learners' attention because it activates individuals' working memory capacity by delivering information in smaller, easier-to-digest bursts.

5 Ways to Design Quality Microlearning

1

Concentrate on brevity.

Build learning modules in efficient bite-size chunks as opposed to hours-long classes. Make it short enough to fit into a commute or short lunch break.

2

Keep the content hyperfocused.

Offer just enough information to help learners grasp one specific skill or concept rather than trying to introduce too much at once.

3

Make it goal-oriented.

Use relevant, career-aligned content and offer suggestions on how to immediately apply new skills in the workplace or other real-world scenarios to encourage engagement and boost retention.

4

Stick to hard skills.

Cognitive science reveals that microlearning is particularly effective for teaching hard skills—such as learning a foreign language, math, and coding—which are reinforced through mental repetition.

5

Package it to go.

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