



LEADERSHIP TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT:

*A Comprehensive Guide to Building
a Leadership Pipeline*



THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT THE SUCCESS OF ANY ORGANIZATION DEPENDS ON THE QUALITY OF ITS LEADERSHIP. Strong leaders drive the performance and effectiveness of others and help to create an environment where every employee can perform to their potential. And yet, according to one survey, 61 percent of companies do not have a leadership training program in place.¹

Take a moment to think about the leadership pipeline at your organization. Do you have people throughout your organization who are prepared to step up into leadership positions? People who are ready to navigate the tides of change? If not, you need to begin investing in effective leadership development. This takes time, resources, and energy, but the investment will build strong, capable leaders, who in turn will lead engaged, productive, innovative, and motivated teams of employees.

This guide addresses everything you need to know about creating a strong leadership development and training program for your organization to ensure a pipeline of ready-now leaders. We'll cover how to identify who should be in the program, the skills and competencies needed at each stage of leadership development, the challenges you might face, and the keys to overcoming these to develop and implement a successful program.

EMERGING LEADERS

Individuals at this level may not yet be in positions of leadership, but they are the pool you will pull from for future leadership needs. By taking a proactive approach to training this group of employees, you can reap the benefits of skilled individual contributors who are prepared to be the leaders of people in the future. A few important leadership training topics for individual contributors who are emerging leaders include:

Interpersonal Communication

No matter an employee's tenure, the ability to communicate clearly, and across a variety of communication channels, in-person, email, and video, is critical. Communication training will ensure your individual contributors have the skills they need today and are on the right path to becoming leaders who are not easily frustrated with others, are able to limit misunderstandings, inspire others with their words, and know when to listen and when to speak.

Time Management

While every individual in an organization needs to be able to manage time effectively, it is particularly important that individuals become proficient at it before moving into a leadership role. Having the ability to prioritize, manage interruptions, and use time productively is a foundational skill without which new leaders will struggle to be successful.

Managing Stress

The way that leaders deal with stress has a profound impact on their teams and on the workplace culture. As such, it is imperative that individuals develop skills and strategies to overcome stressful situations in positive and productive ways before stepping into leadership roles.

Having Difficult Conversations and Resolving Conflict

Difficult conversations and resolving conflict are things that many people struggle with and even avoid. Before they can be effective leaders, individuals must learn to spot the early signs of conflict, see different points of view and influence others to do the same, and use their conflict resolution skills effectively.

Teamwork and Collaboration

Individual contributors need the skills to work effectively as team members. Every employee can benefit from training that teaches them why collaboration is important and what it means to their role at work. Teamwork and collaboration also tap into other critical skills such as communication and time management, thus having a holistic competency solution for emerging leaders is important.





MID-LEVEL LEADERS

Mid-level leaders require a development path for two significant reasons: first, they have the potential to feed into the senior-leadership pipeline; and second, they are the ones who spend the most time and have the most influence over the engagement of your workforce. With that in mind, it is important to provide leadership development activities that help mid-level leaders develop their own capabilities in order to tap into the true potential of those they lead.

Leadership development objectives for people managers include understanding the tools required not only to effectively communicate expectations and deliver feedback, but also to create a high-performance culture of accountability, and to support each direct report for maximum productivity. Mid-level leadership topics should include:

Taking Accountability for Personal Development

Good leaders know that they must continuously invest time, energy, and resources into their personal development. Training that helps mid-level leaders gain self-awareness and perspective on their own growth will set them up with true leadership accountability, and the commitment to learn and hone their skills over time.

Building and Leading Teams

Building high-performing teams requires intentional effort to select and integrate the right people whose skills, work ethic, and personality suit the team they will become a part of. It is then essential for a leader to take charge and ensure all team members feel supported in the transition and are on track to achieve their goals and produce results. Equipping your mid-level leaders with the skills to build and lead teams is crucial to their success.

Giving and Getting Feedback

Leaders have a tremendous impact on employee performance, for better or for worse. In order to make that impact positive, leaders must be able to provide effective feedback, openly receive feedback from employees and their own leaders, actively listen, and ask good questions.

Coaching for Results

While formal feedback is essential, coaching has the potential to improve performance, employee engagement, collaboration, and trust. Leaders who can provide authentic and actionable coaching at key moments will see consistent improvement in team and individual performance and productivity. Equipping mid-level leaders with the skills and tools to maximize their effectiveness as coaches will not only drive performance within their teams, it will set those leaders up for greater leadership opportunities in the future.

SENIOR LEADERS

Senior leaders don't just lead people and operations, they are the major drivers behind company culture, strategic direction, and long-term results. The senior leaders at an organization are the ones who must create and share a compelling corporate vision. Whether they know it or not, they model and therefore determine through their actions, the expected behavioral norms for the entire company.

Leadership development at the senior level must expand the mindset and capacity for delivering world-class organizational results. With a focus on coaching, goal setting, feedback, empowerment, communicating (both one-on-one and to large audiences), strategy and execution, and change management, executives build the competencies necessary to successfully shift from managing teams to leading a high-performing organization.

The competencies that are shared by world-class leaders, and should, therefore, be part of any leadership development program for senior leaders include:

Accountability

Accountability is crucial to organizational success, and it is the role of senior leaders to both model and require it from their teams - and each other. When leaders create a culture of accountability within the organization, it inspires trust, employee engagement, a better customer experience, and passion among individuals and teams to consistently deliver outstanding results.

Influence

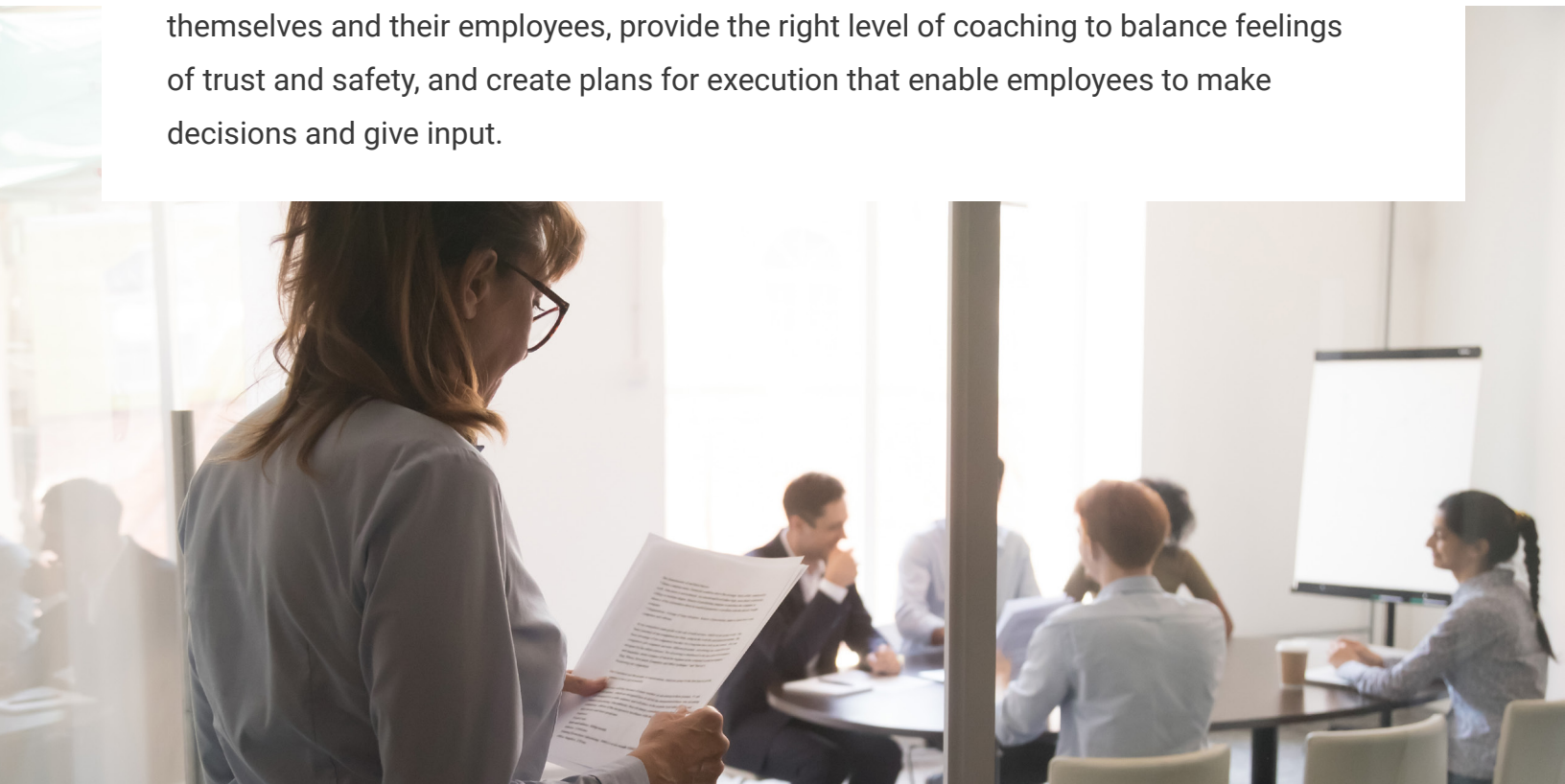
Effective leaders don't command with authority. They inspire, persuade, and encourage others to make their vision a reality. A leader's ability to positively influence others through mutual understanding and aligned priorities has a direct correlation to their ability to get things done and achieve results.

Communication

While the ability to clearly articulate a message is a core skill that leaders at all levels of the organization require, senior leaders need an advanced ability to communicate with clarity, passion, and confidence, and across a variety of communication channels, in-person, email and video conferencing . Yet according to one survey, 91 percent of employees say their leaders lack good communication skills.² World-class communication skills are a requirement for building credibility and trust, and ensuring a clear message whether you are addressing an audience of one, ten, or 1,000 people. Leaders also must be aware of the expanding scope and consequence of their communication, internally and externally, as they advance in the organization, and manage the delivery of their messages accordingly.

Empowering Others

A meta-analysis of 105 studies on employee empowerment found that employees who have a greater sense of autonomy over their work are more committed to meaningful goals, and show more initiative and creativity to achieve them. They also have more trust and faith in their leaders and are more willing to expend discretionary effort at work.³ But empowering employees and leading an empowered workforce are skills that must be learned – leaders must know how to manage the shared responsibility between themselves and their employees, provide the right level of coaching to balance feelings of trust and safety, and create plans for execution that enable employees to make decisions and give input.



Executorial Excellence

While it's crucial that your organization's leaders know how to develop a strategy, it's a moot point if they cannot execute it. It takes an agile and fully equipped leader to translate any strategy into action. Senior leaders must have the ability to effectively establish tactical priorities, cascade execution throughout the team, and adapt the implementation – rather than the strategy – amidst shifting priorities.

Leading Change

The world is moving quickly, and change management isn't enough – organizational success depends on leaders who can lead employees through change. Change leadership includes the ability to create and communicate a clear vision, model and require adaptability, and motivate others through transitional times.

Performance Management

All leaders must be able to provide real-time coaching and feedback, but effective performance management also requires a strong framework that keeps up with the needs of employees and meets the management needs of the organization. Leaders need the skills and tools to set clear performance expectations to support organizational goals, and conduct authentic, practical, and timely performance assessments based on results.

Powering Team Performance

While all leaders should be prepared and able to lead teams, senior leaders have the additional responsibility of bringing together cross-functional teams to achieve something based on their strengths and areas of expertise. Leaders must have a common process to confidently create teams, diagnose gaps in the team's performance, create team dialogue around performance, and direct them accordingly. Ultimately, when every individual gets better at teamwork, the team as a whole improves, works smarter, and produces better results.

HIGH POTENTIALS

Every leadership development program should include strategies for identifying and developing high potential employees within the organization, as these are the individuals who will shape and lead an organization into the future. A study by Gartner found that high potential employees expend 21 percent more effort than other employees, and have a 75 percent greater chance of succeeding at roles that are critical to business performance and the future leadership pipeline.⁴ When you identify and develop those who have high potential to lead, it has a multiplier effect on the rest of the organization.

Identifying and retaining high potentials is not about assigning a label or offering frequent promotions, it's about carefully determining who your high potentials are, what truly motivates them, and how to develop and prepare them for positions of organizational leadership.

High potentials can be found at any level and in any role in an organization, but they are not always easy to spot because performance is not the only indicator – someone can be a high performer but not have the potential or desire to lead. Some possible clues that an individual may have high leadership potential include:

- Motivated to achieve
- Consistently delivers on commitments and seeks out new tasks
- Takes initiative rather than waiting to be told what to do
- Eager to upgrade their skills and capabilities
- Asks for feedback and coaching – and takes action accordingly
- Actively looks for ways to add value and is invested in the company's future
- Executes tasks with enthusiasm and never settles for “good enough”
- Collaboration-minded
- Naturally steps into leadership roles when working in teams
- Works in a manner that upholds the company culture



High potential employees typically already have strong business acumen but need the opportunity to develop the interpersonal skills necessary to be successful in leadership. They require a comprehensive development plan that provides rich experiences and challenges that will facilitate their readiness for positions of leadership. A comprehensive high potential development program should include:

Cross-functional Training: Exposure to new tools, processes, and people provides the frequent challenges that high potentials crave and also helps them build a deeper appreciation for the work performed by others in the organization. Special projects that span across multiple functions provide new ways to accelerate growth and stretch an individual's skills beyond their normal daily routine. They also give senior leaders a chance to observe high potentials as they take more initiative, demonstrate greater accountability, and engage with the broader organization.

Mentorship Opportunities: When high potentials are paired with organizational leaders that have a strong track record of success, they can learn valuable lessons about the nuances of their role and how to be successful. Mentorship relationships also provide opportunities for on-the-job observation and give the high potential employee access to someone who can provide support and answer questions as they arise.

Two-Way Feedback Loop: High potentials crave to know how they are doing and how to improve. It also provides an outlet for them to share feedback on their experiences and observations. They are often the “fresh pair of eyes” that can review existing organizational processes and provide ideas for how to make them more effective.

Formal Leadership Development: Deploying relevant, challenging, and applicable leadership development training is key to the success and engagement of your high potentials. Leadership development for high potential employees equips them with the leadership skills they need to lead, but also the skills on how to pass on their strengths to their direct reports. Some topics that should be included in a high potentials development program are communication, coaching, delivering feedback, having difficult conversations, and empowerment.

WHY DO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FAIL?

When more than 50 percent of senior leaders believe that their leadership development efforts don't adequately build critical skills and organizational capabilities, it's clear that the leadership programs that do exist are not producing the desired results.⁵ Leadership programs that are not effective fail both the organization and the employees who participate in them. The organization doesn't see a return on its investment, and leaders don't acquire the skills and behaviors they need to effectively execute their roles in the company.

Why are leadership programs failing? Harvard Business Review asked the same question and came to these conclusions:

- *Knowing about leadership does not translate to practical execution*
 - *True leadership requires emotional courage or conviction*
 - *Experience is the best teacher of emotional courage⁶*

Our experience with leadership development confirms that this assessment is accurate. We would also add these factors that can contribute to the failure of leadership programs:



Leadership is not limited to senior positions

Some organizations still think that leadership development is only applicable to the most senior positions, when, in fact, leaders exist at every level in the organization. Developing leaders early and throughout their careers ensures your employees are maximizing their potential today and are ready to take on new leadership roles in the future.



Behavior change is essential

Many programs lack methods that focus on changing behavior and focus instead on transferring knowledge. While understanding training content is important, if the information is not applied in practice, the lessons learned in training will not lead to lasting behavior change.



Conviction to change needs to be built

Many leadership programs do not sufficiently focus on building conviction. Without it, there is no drive to make the required changes. Conviction pushes leaders to take ownership of everything they do in because of the inherent belief that their actions make a difference.



Training must be connected to real life

Training that doesn't relate to the challenges employees face every day at work, does not set leaders up to use the knowledge gained. For example, understanding the importance of active listening as a communication skill is not the same as applying it in an interaction with an employee. When leaders don't have the opportunity to practice new skills in training, they may be more reluctant to test-drive those skills back on the job.



Reinforcement and measurement drive results

Not incorporating a post-training reinforcement and measurement strategy is a sure way for programs to fail. In order to create lasting change, new skills and behaviors must be retained, coached, reinforced, and measured over time. Seeing how applying new skills leads to performance improvement prompts individuals to continue their efforts and stay engaged with the development process.

Many of these common pitfalls — failure to foster behavior change, lack of conviction, and no connection to the real world — can be addressed through experiential learning.

DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Developing a leadership development plan begins with analyzing the leadership pipeline as it currently stands. This allows you to understand opportunities and threats, and create a succession plan for critical roles, develop competency models so you can prepare for those roles, create leadership development tracks, and identify the people who should be included.

Create a Succession Plan for Critical Roles

A succession plan is essentially a process for identifying and developing new leaders. Start by documenting how leaders are hired, replaced, and groomed. This should also include emergency procedures for when a leader leaves unexpectedly, including who will step into the role for an interim period, and the steps that will be taken to select a permanent replacement.

This plan must align with company values and the competencies required to fill each leadership role. Placing an individual in a position for which they are not prepared will only result in frustration for all involved.

Treat your succession plan as a living document that is periodically revisited with board members and the executive team. Organizations are dynamic and a plan that makes sense today might need to be adjusted frequently depending on the events that significantly impact your organization's reality.

Develop Competency Models

A competency model is developed by identifying and defining the specific behaviors that lead to success in a particular role or group of roles. This is distinct from a job analysis, which only summarizes functions, skills, and knowledge because competency models describe actual behaviors of individuals who are successful in those roles.

Developing these competency models can support the organization's growth and success because they help you understand the current workforce capability and identify opportunities for learning and growth. They also help serve as a tool in helping employees understand how their capabilities fit with the organization and identify where they need to improve as they continue on their career paths. One study found that 89 percent of organizations defined as "best in class" (those with a wealth of top performers and a strong succession plan) had well-defined core competencies for all job roles, while only 48 percent of other companies had clearly defined competency models.⁷

Competencies can be divided into three main categories:

1. *Organizational or "core" competencies* – behaviors that all employees need to exhibit to be successful, regardless of their role, e.g. good communication, integrity, continuous learning
2. *Functional and job-related competencies* – behaviors required in specific roles or functions, e.g. relationship-building for salespeople, patience for customer service representatives
3. *Leadership competencies* – the skills and behaviors needed to manage and lead people, e.g. coaching, inspiring others

This may seem straightforward but there are some challenges to successfully developing competency models. For example, it's sometimes difficult to identify which competencies are responsible for the success you are trying to replicate throughout your organization. In addition, once you've identified the competencies, it can still be a challenge to link them to your leadership development plan. But since the benefits of developing competency models far outweigh these challenges, it is worth the undertaking to help maximize the impact of your leadership development initiatives.

Create Leadership Development Tracks

Creating a leadership track for employees demonstrates an organizational commitment to their development and prepares future leaders to step into new roles at the organization. A three-phased approach, following the path of the three levels of leaders – emerging, mid-level, and senior leaders – will ensure a pipeline of leaders ready to step in and take on their next challenge.

The leadership development track needs to be designed in a way that builds on itself, so that it reinforces skills and competencies that were previously introduced, and incorporates the more advanced concepts over time. This way, individuals get the chance to apply new skills, benefit from coaching and mentoring as they grow, and see the positive results of their efforts.

As employees move through the track into frontline leadership and beyond, training should include pre and post-work that is directly related to their roles. The outcome of these on-the-job projects will give you an opportunity to assess their level of engagement and commitment to development. Multi-rater leadership development assessments should also be a component of training to give you and the participant feedback from different perspectives, which can help identify areas that need improvement and further coaching.

One advantage of having individuals follow a track that incorporates training over a long period of time is that candidates do not feel that their development is stagnating. They continue to gain new competencies, have time to practice and capitalize on coaching, and have future sessions of development to look forward to. This not only helps them grow and refine their skills, but it also keeps them engaged in the process.

An important thing to remember is that the training sessions themselves need to be relevant, applicable, and engaging. If you do that, as individuals progress through the development track, they will look forward to each session and be able to apply what they learn immediately back on the job.



Invest in Training That Uses Experiential Learning

Experiential training is a highly effective methodology for developing leaders at all levels because it involves interactive activities that provide the opportunity to test new skills in a safe environment, adjust, then gain the confidence to apply the skills immediately. Experiential learning not only delivers information, it can change behavior through eight critical aspects:⁸

1. Participants are fully engaged and committed to achieving an outcome
2. The activity is themed to mask any connection to the day-to-day reality
3. The activity is an exact metaphor for the reality faced by the participants
4. It's captivating for all types of learners whether it's used in the classroom or virtually
5. The compressed timeline creates an intense focus on a single, desired outcome
6. A facilitated debrief connects the results of the experience to the results at work
7. The debrief can be customized to the unique business reality of the audience
8. Participants see the results of their actions, building the necessary conviction to change behavior after the training concludes

When providing leadership training with the expressed intention of building better leaders, adding a component that actually makes the learning fun should be a priority. Doing so increases the interest level for the participants, increases their degree of engagement, and accelerates their learning. And experiential learning does just that. Not only will you develop the identified leadership skills and competencies defined in your development program, but leaders at every level will be engaged throughout.

Implement Cross-Functional On-the-Job Training

A practical training solution for leaders will involve an element of cross-functional training as it gives leaders access to areas of the organization they might not otherwise experience, and the exposure to new tools, processes, and people. Special projects provide another way to accelerate growth, along with opportunities for current and future leaders to stretch their skills beyond their normal daily routines.

Implement a Mentorship Program

As leaders progress through their training and development, the value of being paired with a more experienced leader with a successful track record cannot be overstated. The mentee can learn valuable lessons about the nuances of leadership, and ask questions in an informal setting. Mentorship also helps to reinforce a culture of leadership excellence by ensuring that new leaders learn how to model and apply the company values from experienced leaders who are doing this successfully already.

Develop a New Leadership Integration Plan

Anytime a leader steps into a new role or department, it can be an adjustment for the leader and their employees. You can help to ease that transition by ensuring new leaders have formed strong bonds with existing leadership prior to a full transition. This helps the new leader feel connected to the role and gives their new employees confidence in the transition. Bear in mind that ongoing training and peer feedback will help the successor become more comfortable in their new role and increase their likelihood of success.

Measure Progress and Adapt Accordingly

When an organization invests significant time and resources in leaders, you want to see a return on your investment in the form of improved performance, competency development, and application of new skills. A measurement and reporting strategy can help you objectively assess the development metrics that are most meaningful to your organization. A retention strategy will also help improve performance by consistently keeping the training top-of-mind. Reinforcing new knowledge through tools such as mobile platforms, interactive games, and group discussions are essential for long-term behavior change. In addition to assessing competency development among peers, performance evaluations should also reference data from outside the organization for comparison. Referencing industry and role benchmarks in performance evaluations will help assess an employee's current standing, set new goals, or re-evaluate existing goals. Failure to continually set new goals that stretch leadership skills can result in a feeling of stagnation, which can ultimately lead to turnover of your best and most crucial leaders.



WHAT MAKES FOR A GREAT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PARTNER?

Whether you are working to develop your high potentials or honing the skills of your top department leaders, working with an experienced partner can help you build a leadership training and development program that addresses your organization's unique learning needs and future goals. Here are the key things to look for when choosing a leadership training and development partner.

1. Partnership-Oriented

One challenge associated with leadership development is ensuring that the training is relevant to your organization and the day-to-day realities faced by your leaders. An effective leadership development program is designed with you, not for you. Choose a provider that is willing to work in partnership with you, so they can deliver against your needs and your reality, and address the unique challenges faced by your leaders.

2. Consultation Services and Strategic Rollout Support

A strong leadership development partner should be able to help you identify your goals and needs. Choose a partner who can work with you to clarify your current leadership pipeline and any challenges associated with it, achieve alignment on the path forward, and who can then help you implement the program beyond simply delivering the training content.

3. Global Presence

If you work or have customers in more than one place, you should choose a partner that takes a global perspective. From delivering training in regional offices or virtually, to operating in multiple languages, to understanding local challenges, a partner with global capabilities will be able to meet the complex needs of ambitious global companies.

4.

Proven Methodology

Learning leadership theory is not enough to see a change in personal behavior and skill level. While leadership training must deliver knowledge, it must also promote understanding and give time for practice. If you successfully achieve these three things, it will be clear to participants what they are changing, how they are changing, and why they are changing their current behavior. This builds conviction in the participants that changing is beneficial, worth pursuing—or possibly even required. Choose a partner who uses an experiential learning methodology that will accomplish this.

5.

Custom Content

In order to be relevant, applicable, and engaging, the content of your leadership training program must fit seamlessly with your organization. Choose a partner who can incorporate real examples from your company, address actual challenges that your leaders may face, and provide opportunities to practice the most relevant competencies. Any materials they provide should look and feel like they are coming from your company, with your logo and branding.





6.

Proven Track Record

Don't leave your leadership development needs up to chance. Look for a partner that has a proven record of success in your industry or one with similar challenges. While they may not always be able to share the names of clients for privacy reasons, they should be able to provide examples of their work and the approaches they have taken to achieve results like the ones you are seeking.

7.

Delivery Options

In today's world, with a dispersed workforce, regional offices, and in-house training teams, it is important to work with a partner who can flex with you, no matter your needs. Seek out a partner who offers a wide variety of delivery options in order to meet your needs today, and as you grow, your needs for tomorrow. From in-class training to virtual learning, to a blend of the two, your partner should have multiple delivery options available to ensure the training is delivered using your desired approach.

ACHIEVE EXCELLENCE WITH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The success of any organization is dependent on its leaders. From front-line leadership to the C-suite, your leaders are the driving force behind strategy, goals, organizational culture, and every other crucial component of the business. In order to maximize the strength of leadership, every organization should have a strong leadership development plan. Planning ahead will ensure transitional times are much smoother for everyone impacted. Your organization will also greatly benefit from having a strategy in place to develop leadership skills of individual contributors all the way up to the executive team, and identifying high potential future leaders will keep the leadership pipeline full and ensure that leaders are set up for success when the time comes to step into positions of leadership. Though bear in mind you never have to go it alone. A leadership training and development provider who acts as your partner will significantly alleviate the stress on your internal team and resources, and help guarantee success and a return on your company's investment.



Since our founding in 1988, Eagle's Flight has developed and refined a framework for creating predictable, sustainable behavior change. We specialize in experiential learning and provide organizations with a better outcome by truly engaging the learner. Successful organizational development programs require ongoing work, but this can easily get lost in the shuffle of daily tasks that feel more urgent. Partnering with a provider that has a strong track record of helping organizations achieve long-term, measurable change will help ensure that your development goals are met.

If you would like to learn more about how Eagle's Flight can support your corporate culture goals, contact us today.

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