

# WHY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FAILS (and How to Make it a Success)



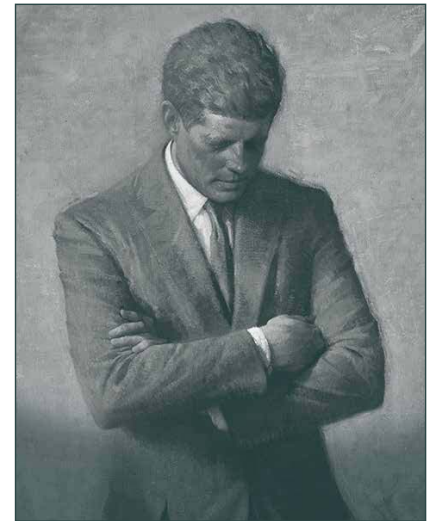
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT CAN BE GENERALLY DEFINED AS ANY ACTIVITY THAT ENHANCES THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION. IT'S A SIMPLE CONCEPT, BUT ALL TOO OFTEN IT FAILS BECAUSE OF ITS INHERENTLY LOOSE MEANING. For example, leadership development could refer to individuals trying to better themselves, or leaders attempting to develop their employees for reasons such as succession planning. This has created a booming industry. Last year alone, American organizations spent “approximately \$164.2 billion on [development]. Of this total direct learning expenditure, 61 percent (\$100.2 billion) was spent internally. The remainder was spent on external services, which accounted for 28 percent (\$46 billion); and tuition reimbursement accounted for 11 percent (\$18 billion),” according to an ASTD study. Interest in the area of leadership development has exploded in the past 20 years, and yet programs meant to develop leadership continue to fall short of what they are intended to accomplish. Why is that?

Not only is the term defined broadly, but individuals seeking leadership development often confuse it for management training and overlook context. On top of that, they do not decouple learning and reflection from actual, hands-on work experience, nor do they continually measure results or assess the proper mindset. All of these add up to a gigantic flop when it comes to effective leadership development. The good news is, once these issues are realized and addressed, they can be fixed.

This white paper will outline some of the main reasons why leadership development programs fail, and how to effectively develop leaders.

## 01 | MISTAKING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR MANAGEMENT TRAINING

According to a report published by Pennsylvania State University, a distinction must be made between leadership development and management training.



**“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”**  
—President John F. Kennedy

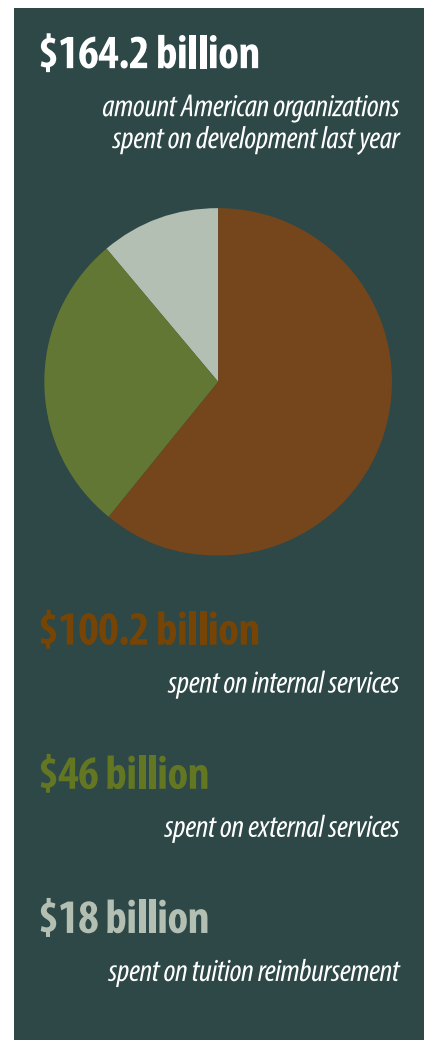
*“Just as leadership and management are different (but interrelated) concepts, their respective development has unique emphasis. Management development primarily includes managerial education and training, with an emphasis on acquiring specific types of knowledge, skills, and abilities to enhance task performance in management roles. Another characteristic feature of management development is the application of proven solutions to known problems, which gives it mainly a training orientation.”*

Management can be *taught*, leadership can only be *developed*. Management is specific to the position and organization; leadership enables people to work together in meaningful ways, regardless of the setting.

Leadership is not a formula. It’s not a math equation in which variables can be substituted or interchanged with foreseeable results. According to the Penn State report, “Leadership development is defined as expanding the collective capacity of organizational members to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes. Leadership roles refer to those that come with and without formal authority, whereas management development focuses on performance in formal managerial roles.”

One way to minimize confusion between management and leadership, especially in regards to training, is to look at the exact function of each role. The Wall Street Journal gives some examples of specific differences between management and leadership from renowned leadership author, Warren Bennis, in his book titled, “On Becoming a Leader”:

- The manager administers—the leader innovates.
- The manager is a copy—the leader is an original.
- The manager maintains—the leader develops.
- The manager focuses on systems and structure—the leader focuses on people.
- The manager relies on control;—the leader inspires trust.
- The manager has a short-range view—the leader has a long-range perspective.
- The manager asks how and when—the leader asks what and why.
- The manager has his or her eye always on the bottom line—the leader’s eye is on the horizon.



- The manager imitates—the leader originates.
- The manager accepts the status quo—the leader challenges it.
- The manager is the classic good soldier—the leader is his or her own person.
- The manager does things right—the leader does the right thing.

Peter Drucker said, “One does not ‘manage’ people. The task is to lead people. And the goal is to make productive the specific strengths and knowledge of each individual.” Simply put, a leader’s mission is to lead; a manager’s goal is to manage, following the leader’s vision.

## 02 | OVERLOOKING CONTEXT

Leadership development must be viewed in context. There are three ways of looking at it:

1. There is the conceptual context, in which one considers the difference between developing leaders and leadership development.
2. There is the practice context, which reviews what types of development can be utilized and applied.
3. There is the research context, which relates to research that has direct and indirect implications for leadership development.

Apart from the intellectual standpoint, it must be remembered that what works in one situation does not always work in another.

According to a McKinsey report, “Too many training initiatives we come across rest on the assumption that one size fits all, and that the same group of skills or style of leadership is appropriate regardless of strategy, organizational culture, or CEO mandate.” The question companies or individuals need to ask themselves before beginning a leadership development program is: “What is this program for?”

Leadership development, for both individuals and companies, should be tailored to a “from-to” path—such as developing a high-potential employee into a leadership position—and looking at the context is the only way to effectively adapt a development plan.

Typically, when it comes to leadership development, emphasis is placed on individual-based knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with formal leadership which, once learned, enable people to think and act in new ways. These skills are usually associated with self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-control. However, without knowing the context and role in which these competencies will be applied, truly effective leadership skills cannot be developed.

## 03 | CONFUSING CONCEPTUAL VS. REAL-WORLD APPLICATION

Leadership development can be a balancing act of sorts. There can be value in off-site development opportunities, but they are virtually worthless if the lessons learned aren't applied directly to every day experience. "Adults typically retain just 10 percent of what they hear in classroom lectures, versus nearly two-thirds when they learn by doing. Furthermore, burgeoning leaders, no matter how talented, often struggle to transfer even their most powerful off-site experiences into changed behavior on the front line," according to the McKinsey report.

The solution seems simple enough—tying what one learns to what one does—but it's easier said than done. It's difficult to find opportunities to apply conceptual ideas to real-world activities.

The McKinsey report adds: "The ability to push training participants to reflect, while also giving them real work experiences to apply new approaches and hone their skills, is a valuable combination in emerging markets. There, the gap between urgent 'must do' projects and the availability of capable leaders presents an enormous challenge. In such environments, companies should strive to make every major business project a leadership-development opportunity as well, and to integrate leadership-development components into the projects themselves."

Learning great leadership without application is like telling someone the fundamentals of swimming, then expecting them to be the next Michael Phelps before they ever touch the water. It doesn't work that way. The person needs to be thrown into the shallow end and make it to the other side, even if that involves some initial struggling at first. There can be lifeguards on hand to



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make sure they don't drown, but ultimately they need to be challenged and figure it out themselves. It's the same with developing leaders. They need to be placed in situations that may be uncomfortable and even a little scary at first, but eventually they will develop the muscle and movement to take on more challenging depths. It's all about putting what they know about leadership into practice.

## 04 | HAVING AN INFLEXIBLE MINDSET

Perhaps the hardest part about developing a leader (yourself or others) is understanding one must change their behavior before they can change their leadership abilities. It seems obvious enough, but in order to change behavior, mindset has to be altered as well. Not unlike Cool Hand Luke, you have to get your mind right. Moreover, developing yourself should feel uncomfortable.

A better analogy may be that of an athlete. An athlete in training will feel muscle discomfort. They should. As an athlete struggles to get stronger, faster, etc., they will feel the pains of development. So should a leader in regard to their performance. It's not always easy. As the McKinsey report said, "Identifying some of the deepest, 'below the surface' thoughts, feelings, assumptions, and beliefs is usually a precondition of behavioral change—one too often shirked in development programs." Promoting the virtues of delegation and empowerment, for example, is fine in theory, but successful adoption is unlikely if the program participants have a clear "controlling" mind-set. It's true that some personality traits (such as extroversion or introversion) are difficult to shift, but people can change the way they see the world and their values.

According to "Leadership Charisma," an extremely helpful book for those seeking leadership development, good leadership "is simply a question of behavior."

*"Becoming a charismatic leader begins with this critical first step—the decision to commit to the development of behaviors that will drive your leadership charisma higher, and bring you the results achieved only by those charismatic leaders who inspire their people to greater levels of engagement and productivity."*

The book further points out that the most important choice is to commit. It may not be easy, and may feel uncomfortable, but truly committing to leadership development is the only effective way to see results, and those results will pay off in time.

## 05 | NOT MEASURING RESULTS

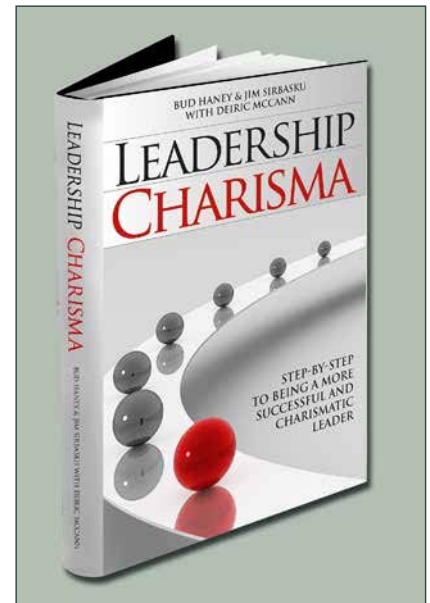
Coming back to the athlete, what good is practice if the results aren't measured? How would they know if they're jumping higher, running faster, or lifting a heavier weight if they are not comparing it against previous records and individuals? The same principle applies to leadership development.

Too often, individuals and organizations talk a big game about developing leadership—investing nothing more than lip service—but never follow through or quantify the results. Another issue arises when the evaluation of leadership development begins and ends with participant feedback. When this occurs, the program is often revised to suit the participants and provide a more pleasant delivery. Again, development should be uncomfortable, but using the right tools can make it easier.

One of the best ways to quantifiably measure leadership development is to implement a 360-degree leadership assessment tool to help managers identify and prioritize their own development opportunities and leadership skills.

Effective leaders are essential for maintaining a successful company. You need to ensure that your leaders grow and constantly improve. Leadership assessment solutions can help you understand where leaders need support and training—and can suggest the best ways to motivate and encourage these employees.

For example, the CheckPoint 360<sup>™</sup> evaluates a wide range of job skills and leadership aptitudes based on surveys completed by staff members who work in a variety of different capacities with the leader being evaluated. The data generated in the assessment report provides measurable recommendations of tactics that can improve leadership skills and enhance professional development.



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## HOW TO EFFECTIVELY DEVELOP LEADERS

It really boils down to ownership. If an individual or company doesn't want to develop, they simply won't. According to an MIT Sloan Management Review, "it's natural to ask 'who should own the responsibility for leadership development?' The fact is, this is the wrong question. Ownership of resources, especially human resources, is old-world thinking and does not reflect the reality of organizational life today." The point is, management or other outside influences cannot affect personal leadership development. Only you can.

The role of the organization should be to provide opportunities for development through challenging assignments, while the individual's role is to assume responsibility for taking advantage of those opportunities, seeking feedback on their performance, and making realistic assessments about their goals. With this approach, individuals are still responsible for their own development—thus more willing to take the developmental strides necessary to be successful—while the organization maintains the responsibility of developing its people into leaders.

There is nothing wrong with trying to keep up with the latest trends on leadership and management development. The rush to monetize these ideas, however, creates the tendency for managers to think that leadership development can take place in one-day, paint-by-the-numbers, "edutainment" sessions. When such thinking is exposed as manifestly false, companies may be tempted to give up altogether, without teaching anyone anything.

One way to reduce the disconnect associated with leadership development is to align it with specific strategic goals. "The full utilization of a company's training center does not matter if employees perceive that they are wasting their time attending programs that do not build competitive capability or create the next generation of talent," according to the Sloan review. Make sure the person being developed knows that their efforts will actually make a difference.

Moreover, hold yourself and those you are trying to develop accountable. Encourage your high potentials by letting them know they are recognized and observed. And, of course, once the structure of specific leadership development



is defined, appropriate metrics must be put into place to ensure that development can be quantifiably measured, in order to track progress.

## CONCLUSION

Commitment is the absolute first step in developing yourself into a great leader. When developing others, proper identification is the key. Look for high potentials in your organization. Traits to look for when identifying high-potential employees include:

- They know the business
- Others respect them
- They are ambitious
- They work well with others
- They are willing to take risks

Most importantly, these high-potential people are most likely to take the ownership necessary to commit to developing themselves as leaders.

Leadership development is a difficult road—that's why many leadership development programs fail, and will continue to do so, until they are taken seriously by those participating in them. Mistaking leadership development for management training, overlooking context, not applying conceptual learning to hands-on doing, maintaining a stubborn mindset, and failing to measure results are all reasons contributing to the failure of leadership development.

Don't assume your 20-year veteran is suitable for a leadership role; identify high potentials in all areas and timeframes based on work-related behaviors, abilities, and personalities—then coach, nurture, and develop them. It's important to make these programs relevant, and not simply a passing fad.

Take advantage of the leadership development solutions that Profiles International has to offer.

***Great leaders can be developed; it just takes time and the courage to follow through.***



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**The fact is, this is the wrong question. Ownership of resources, especially human resources, is old-world thinking and does not reflect the reality of organizational life today.”**

*—MIT Sloan Management Review*

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