

# Growing future leaders

The hard truths and hot principles of effective leadership development



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“For most leaders, the greatest challenge is not understanding the practice of leadership. It is practicing their understanding of leadership.”

Marshall Goldsmith

# The hard truths

A majority of HR directors agree that their leadership development programs are ineffective or not providing lasting results.<sup>1</sup> It's<sup>2</sup> a confronting reality, particularly when research suggests we are investing billions of dollars into the effort,<sup>3</sup> and developing leaders is number one global priority for HR executives.<sup>4</sup> In the U.S. alone, it's reported by McKinsey that companies are spending \$14 billion annually on leadership development. That's a lot of dosh!

## Why then, are our leadership development programs not working?

When addressing any development issue we first need to know the gap to close the gap. So let's explore some hard truths about the current gap in leadership development dynamics. Be warned! It may not be a comfortable ride. You'd better take a seat... :)

55% of HR directors report that their leadership development programs were not very effective, or didn't provide lasting benefit. Bain & Co<sup>5</sup>

66% of HR executives believe their organization is weak in providing focused leadership programs for millennials. Deloitte<sup>6</sup>

1 Mark Horwitch and Meredith Whipple, *Leaders who inspire: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century approach to developing your talent*, Bain & Co.

2 Deloitte Consulting LLP and Bersin by Deloitte, 2014, *Global Human Capital Trends 2014: Engaging the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce*.

3 Jenny Cermak and Monica McGurk, July 2010, *Putting a value on training*, McKinsey Quarterly.

4 Deloitte Consulting LLP and Bersin by Deloitte, 2014, *Global Human Capital Trends 2014: Engaging the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce*.

5 Mark Horwitch and Meredith Whipple, *Leaders who inspire: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century approach to developing your talent*, Bain & Co.

6 Deloitte Consulting LLP and Bersin by Deloitte, 2014, *Global Human Capital Trends 2014: Engaging the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce*.



# 1

## Leadership development is broken

There, I said it. Maybe you're not one of the many HR professionals who experience this to be true, but if this statement strikes a chord, then perhaps the ideas in this paper can help you.

The old way of developing future leaders relies heavily on a classroom experience and is focused on generic content. What future leaders really want is an experience. They want to have a go at real work and get real-time feedback.<sup>7</sup> They want to work on projects that matter AND develop their leadership skills at the same time.

Traditional leadership development is not getting traction because it doesn't follow the key principles that create effective learning. The content is not tailored and relevant to the individual, and there is not sufficient follow up and embedding of skills back in the workplace.<sup>8</sup> New behaviours and ways of thinking are not encouraged to take hold.

What I like to call '**Tractional development**,' on the other hand, takes a new approach. It follows the flow of a natural learning experience to ensure development efforts actually stick. It combines relevant content, aimed at both mindset change and mechanical change, with practical application over an extended period of time. It encourages instant feedback and ensures new habits have time to take hold. We'll cover more on this later. The two approaches are compared below.

Future leaders want to practice leadership, not just learn about it.



<sup>7</sup> Deloitte Consulting LLP and Bersin by Deloitte, 2014, *Global Human Capital Trends 2014: Engaging the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce*.

<sup>8</sup> Nick Petrie, 2011, *Future Trends in Leadership Development*, Centre for Creative Leadership White Paper



## Traditional Development

- ▶ **Single event**  
A typical classroom based workshop without follow-up
- ▶ **Content focused**  
Emphasis on knowledge and understanding (theory)
- ▶ **Generic**  
Content not tailored to the organisation or the individual
- ▶ **Arid application environment**  
There is no on-the-job support to encourage application and embedding of new skills
- ▶ **In addition to real work**  
Not tied to existing business priorities and objectives
- ▶ **No measurements**  
Hard to measure as it's not aligned with actual business outcomes



## 'Tractional' Development

- ▶ **Continual events**  
Multiple learning events create touch points over time to enhance learning effectiveness
- ▶ **Application focused**  
Emphasis on practice and embedding (action)
- ▶ **Tailored**  
Content is tailored to both the organisation and the individual, increasing relevance
- ▶ **Fertile application environment**  
On-the-job support is formalised and encouraged to aid the application and embedding of new skills
- ▶ **Embedded in real work**  
Application opportunities are tied to real business outcomes
- ▶ **Performance measurements**  
Easier to measure results as the new behaviours are linked to actual performance metrics

It's clear why traditional development methods simply aren't working. Yes, we are doing leadership development, but not in a way that's effective. Our intention is sound, but it appears our execution is not.

# 2

## The Lone Ranger leader is no more

Leadership is vital at all levels, whether you hold the formal title or not. Leadership is a team effort. It requires a delicate dance of individuals empowered to move fluidly in and out of leadership roles (formal or otherwise) as the moment arises.

We need people to be able to step into their personal leadership in any given moment, in any given situation that fits their skill set. It is too much to expect people who hold a leadership title to handle all the complex problems on their own in today's corporate environment.

We're better off teaching each individual (earmarked leader or not), how to coach, develop, and support others, than we are sending a handful of solo leaders off to become the formal lone leader of tomorrow.

“There needs to be a greater focus on collective rather than individual leadership.”  
Nick Petrie<sup>9</sup>

“Leadership should be developed by everyone. It's not just for actual leaders; it's everyone's responsibility.” Bain & Co<sup>10</sup>



<sup>9</sup> Nick Petrie, 2011, *Future Trends in Leadership Development*, Centre for Creative Leadership White Paper

<sup>10</sup> Mark Horwitch and Meredith Whipple, *Leaders who inspire: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century approach to developing your talent*, Bain & Co.

# 3

## We're not listening

It appears that Gen-Y know best. The workforce is telling us what they want, but we're not listening. Future leaders are asking for 'Tractional development.' They are calling us into the future of effective learning, but we're not listening... yet.

Generation-Y wants an experience. They want meaningful work, a sense of accomplishment, and a chance to excel. And we're giving them a traditional training event. Which leads me to hard truth #4.



1 in 4 millennials are asking for a chance to show their leadership skills. Deloitte<sup>11</sup>

"Leadership should be developed by everyone. It's not just for actual leaders; it's everyone's responsibility." Bain & Co<sup>10</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Presentation by Alec Bashinsky, Aug 2014, *Shaping Talent for the Future*, Deloitte.

<sup>12</sup> Presentation by Alec Bashinsky, Aug 2014, *Shaping Talent for the Future*, Deloitte.

# 4

## It's our fault (Yikes!)

Ouch! I know, this is a big one. (Are you still sitting down?! I hope so.) It seems that we have trained future leaders to be passive in their learning. We have taught them that training and development come from a department and a program, and not from our everyday environment.

We have trained them that if they want to become leaders, they need to apply to their manager to take a course. Their manager has to apply to HR to approve a course. Then HR goes off and builds or buys a course. So the development responsibility sits outside of the person, because it's always somebody else's job.

In reality, we know that the most effective learning happens on the job. We also know that the next generation of leaders is hungry for this type of development. They are ready to help us move from Traditional development to Tractional development.

Dare I say, it seems that we need to get with the program and follow what works.

“Organizations have changed. Technology has changed. And the nature of work has changed. But L&D has not advanced in the last quarter century.” Clark and Quinn<sup>13</sup>



<sup>13</sup> Clark N. Quinn, 2014, *Revolutionize Learning & Development: Performance and Innovation Strategy for the Information Age*. Pfeiffer.

# 5 hot principles

How do we shift from Traditional development to Tractional development to grow our future leaders in a way that really works?

There are many ways to transition from one side of the equation to the other but let's keep it simple and start with five hot principles.



# 1

## Follow, don't force

Find out what's working, and follow it.

- How are people already developing leadership skills?
- How are they getting opportunities and stretch assignments?
- Who is best at providing these and supporting the new leaders as they learn and grow?

Find them. Model them. Teach others to be like them.

Review your existing leadership programs. Note what's working and what's not and do something about it. Don't force people into a legacy development system that ticks the boxes but doesn't create leaders. Nobody wins under this model. You can change this.

- What percentage of your leadership programs are Traditional versus Tractional?
- How can you shift this balance toward Tractional development?
- Who can support you in this?

"An organisation develops people. It either forms them or deforms them."  
Peter Drucker

# 2

## Tailor the content

The content needs to be practical and relevant, both to the company and the individual. Leadership is a nebulous concept. Organisations need a clear vision of where the organisation is and what kinds of behaviours it needs to move the business agenda forward.

Leadership is not a one-size-fits-all concept. Leadership is made up of a set of behaviours and ways of thinking that are unique to each environment. Find out what your organisation needs and develop that – and only that.

- Is your organisation in a growth phase? A consolidation phase?
- Does it need to improve the balance sheet or focus on efficiency and innovation?
- Does it need to improve customer focus and company reputation?

Content also needs to be tailored to each individual. It needs to focus equally on changing mindsets and skill sets, and it needs to be embedded in real work.

- What does the future leader need to work on the most?
- How can this be tied to a current business priority?
- Who can they model to pick up tips and tricks for getting there?

The answers to all these questions will point to the behaviours required to enact the right kind of leadership in your organisation.

“You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him to discover it in himself.”  
Galileo

# 3

## Process AND content

The process of leadership development is just as important as the content of leadership development. The content itself becomes irrelevant if people can't apply it and don't get a chance to integrate it. It's about the process of delivery AND the quality of content.

- Where do you invest your development budget? In the learning event or the follow up activities?
- Are workshops spaced over time?
- Are they interspersed with opportunities for reflection and discussion?

50% of learning effectiveness comes from the follow up activities after a program. Dr. Brent Peterson<sup>14</sup>

14 Presentation by Jim and Wendy Kirkpatrick, 2009, *Training on Trial: The urgent need to meet the needs of the business.*

# 4

## We need to redefine our roles

Future leaders need to speak up about what they want and what they need to get there.

Current leaders need to know the critical impact they have on the development of future leaders back on the job.

HR/L&D support functions need to move from provider of leadership development programs to partnering with the business to develop leaders in ways that get real traction.

- Where do employees go for leadership development?
- What does that tell you about how they see their role in developing leadership capability?
- Is HR/L&D a provider or a partner?

“Producing results is a whole organization responsibility.”  
Robert Brinkerhoff

# 4

## Dig for development in disguise

We need to move beyond formal training as the ‘be all and end all’ of leadership development. We need to help leaders dig for the development in everyday opportunities. The gold is in the field of everyday work, but we can only find it if we move beyond the formal classroom.

- Do employees turn to informal learning opportunities before formal programs (mentoring/shadowing/interviewing role models/job swapping)?
- Are future leaders encouraged to try new things and fail as a learning experience?
- Are there multiple ways to practice developing leadership skills outside the classroom?

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We’ve faced some hard truths about why leadership development is broken and we’ve explored some hot principles for getting it back on track. Now it’s over to you.

“We don’t need to keep adding development; we just need to start extracting it.” Nick Petrie.

“A little knowledge that acts is worth infinitely more than much knowledge that is idle.”

John Quincy Adams

# About the Author – Anneli Blundell

- Professional People Whisperer
- Skilled parallel parker
- Running, salsa and roller-blading addict

As a professional People Whisperer, Anneli has been working with leaders and teams to improve their communication and interpersonal intelligence for almost a decade. She brings to her clients a recognised expertise in the field of below conscious communication and motivation. She is obsessed with decoding people and performance dynamics for improved results.

Fuelled by her passion to create behaviour change programs that stick, Anneli partners with her clients to co-create practical and relevant people and performance solutions that provide real results.

Anneli is also an accomplished speaker, author and mentor who has published 2 books on shifting human behaviour (to assist coaches and facilitators). Her latest book, [\*Developing Direct Reports: Taking the guesswork out of leading leaders\*](#), is a practical leader's guide for developing performance at work. Anneli's flagship leadership program for young professionals was a recent finalist in the 2014 LearnX Awards and she was a proud finalist in ANZI Coaching's 'Coach of the Year Awards' in 2010, earning the designation of Master Coach in 2012.



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