

Business Leadership Programs Ignore the Key Ingredients of Success

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Leadership development and executive coaching programs have become pretty widespread in companies and organizations today, and with good reason: Positive, effective leadership is essential for success within today's turbulent work environment. Moreover, growing your leadership skills is also necessary for successful career development in today's workplace, where nothing is guaranteed.

But there's a problem with these programs: Many fail to help with three crucial areas: building personal growth through self-awareness and self-examination; learning the leadership actions that increase company success in the midst of a changing workforce and fluid environment; and then, learning to align the two.

The absence of programs that really help in these areas gets reflected in [periodic surveys](#) finding that people at all levels are unhappy and dissatisfied with their work and careers. They struggle with the [emotional impact](#) of negative, unhealthy leadership that appears stuck in a 20th century mindset of top down, command-and-control.

Executive development programs typically take you through questionnaires, various exercises and "tools" to build skills and resolving roadblocks or conflicts. Many of them provide important and useful help for strengthening leaders' knowledge and capacity for greater effectiveness in their roles. Some are provided by large consulting organizations like [Right Management](#); others by university executive education programs, such as [Harvard's](#) or [Wharton's](#). Efforts have been made to [evaluate](#) the effectiveness and scope of coaching programs, as well.

But many of them miss, on the one hand, building the necessary self-awareness of your "drivers" as a leader or manager. That is, your emotional makeup, your values and attitudes; your personality traits, and your unresolved conflicts. You're a total person, not just a set of skills performing a role.

On the other hand, the programs often fail to incorporate current knowledge about the changing workforce, as well as the [link between](#) sustainable, socially responsible practices and long-term business or mission success. Yet bringing these two key ingredients together is the vehicle for both a thriving career and organization. Let's look at both:

Self-Awareness and Self-Examination

Personal growth and career growth go hand-in-hand, and are the foundation for successful leadership in today's organizations. Most successful and satisfied executives, whether at the top

or on their way up, practice some form of self-awareness and self-examination. They learn to align their personal values and life goals with the kinds of leadership practices that will promote growth and development at all levels.

Becoming self-aware and orienting yourself to self-examination involves your entire mentality - that mixture of your emotions, your mental perspectives and attitudes, your values and beliefs. It includes, for example:

Learning from your personal "time-line." That is, the key turning points in both your career and personal life, with an eye to what's shaped your values, life goals, and attitudes. How your career decisions and experiences have shaped or had impact on your personal development. And vice-versa: How experiences and events in your personal life have influenced your career. Moreover, what the long-term consequences of both have been, good and bad.

Your personal values. How they support or impede your subordinates' development, your relationships with peers and with superiors.

Your openness to facing and dealing with personal conflicts. Everyone has some, and emotional blind spots will eventually erupt or intrude in undermining or dysfunctional ways at work.

Your level of relationship competency. How effective you are interacting with diverse people and diverse agendas. How your verbal and nonverbal communication impacts different people, and how theirs affect you.

Your political savvy. The capacity to see people's agendas or maneuvering towards some objective they seek, and factoring that into your interactions.

The above include strengths to further develop and enhance, as well as issues that can undermine effective management and derail you. Personal self-examination is a holistic task. You can't fragment it, or you end up a fragmented person.

Building "Green" Leadership

On the organizational side, coaching towards successful leadership includes knowing the range of social and economic forces that impact companies today. These forces require positive, "green" leadership strategies, in the broadest sense. They include:

A changing workforce. It's [shifting towards](#) younger generations who bring different attitudes and motivations. And, towards greater diversity -- ethnically, racially and culturally - as well as diversity of gender and sexual orientation.

A new norm of [constant "flux."](#) It requires continuous innovation; an open, transparent, collaborative form of leadership that supports management strategist Umair Haque's [description](#) of a "builder" rather than an old-style "leader." Phil Libin, chief executive of [Evernote](#), illustrates an aspect of this environment, [saying](#), "We always try to ask whether a particular policy exists because it's a default piece of corporate stupidity that everyone expects you to have, or does it

actually help you accomplish something? And very often you realize that you don't really know why you're doing it this way, so we just stop doing it." Effective leaders in this new environment are also keenly aware of what not to pursue, not just what they want to go after, as Greg McKeown, CEO of [THIS, Inc.](#), [recently described](#) regarding what he learned from an Apple executive.

Increasing embrace of sustainable practices. Along with corporate social responsibility initiatives, promoting social good and building a psychologically healthy management culture, knowledge that all are linked with long-term success. New thinking and programs exist regarding these shifts from leaders, but mostly from outside conventional coaching and leadership development programs. For example, a program for designing a [data-driven sustainability program](#); writings by CSR leader [John Friedman](#), examples described by environmental business consultant [Anca Novacovici](#), and others.

A recent [commencement address](#) by Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg nailed the essence of the workplace and career environment that now exists and its implications. She described what leadership development programs often appear to not grasp, or don't incorporate into their programs. Though speaking to Harvard Business School graduates, her message is relevant to all levels of management and leadership:

As traditional structures are breaking down, leadership has to evolve from command and control to listening and guiding... you will not be able to rely on who you are or the degree you hold (but) on what you know... you're going to need the ability to communicate authentically, to speak so that you inspire the people around you and to listen so that you continue to learn each and every day on the job.

Control and power are shifting from institutions to individuals...look for opportunities, look for growth, look for impact, look for mission. Move sideways, move down, move on, move off. Build your skills, not your resume. More than anything else, you're going to need the ability to communicate authentically. A good leader recognizes that most people won't feel comfortable challenging authority, so it falls upon authority to encourage them to question.

As we strive to be more authentic in our communication, we should also strive to be more authentic in a broader sense. I talk a lot about bringing your whole self to work--something I believe in deeply. You have to know what (employees) love and hate, what they feel, not just what they think. I don't believe we have a professional self from Mondays through Fridays and a real self for the rest of the time. That kind of division probably never worked, but in today's world, with real and authentic voice, it makes even less sense.

It's clear that we live and work in a transformed -- and transforming -- world. Programs that aim to strengthen leadership from the *outside* would do well to learn from those who already know what supports successful careers and leadership, from *within*.

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