



The 70-20-10 Rule

How do you learn to be an effective leader? Follow the 70-20-10 rule.

A research-based, time-tested guideline for developing managers says that you need to have three types of experience, using a 70-20-10 ratio: challenging assignments (70 percent), developmental relationships (20 percent) and coursework and training (10 percent).

The 70-20-10 rule emerged from 30 years of CCL's Lessons of Experience research, which explores how executives learn, grow and change over the course of their careers.

"The underlying assumption is that leadership is learned," says CCL's Meena Surie Wilson. "We believe that today, even more than before, a manager's ability and willingness to learn from experience is the foundation for leading with impact."

The 70-20-10 rule seems simple, but you need to take it a step further.

All experiences are not created equal. Which experiences contribute the most to learning and growth? And what specific leadership lessons can be learned from each experience?

To help you (and your boss or direct reports) match your learning needs to the experiences most likely to provide that learning, CCL has researched and mapped out the links between experiences and lessons learned.

Wilson and her colleagues recently completed a study that extended CCL's long-standing findings, rooted in U.S.-based corporations, to a global audience. They collaborated with organizations in India, China and Singapore to review and extend what CCL knows about how leadership is learned.

Key Findings

In China, India, Singapore and the United States, there are important similarities and differences in the way leadership is learned from experiences. Five universally important sources of leadership learning stand out from studies of these four countries:

1. Bosses and superiors
2. Turnarounds
3. Increases in job scope
4. Horizontal moves
5. New initiatives

Additionally, each respective country draws from two unique sources of leadership:

- China: *personal experiences and mistakes*
- India: *personal experiences and crossing cultures*
- Singapore: *stakeholder engagements and crises*
- United States: *mistakes and ethical dilemmas*

Among the leadership lessons learned from experiences, three are ranked as universally important in all four countries: *managing direct reports, self-awareness and executing effectively*.

To adapt and grow, leaders need to be constantly involved in new experiences and challenges that, by their very nature, foster learning. Some of these new opportunities will come their way through new jobs, crises or significant challenges. But changing jobs is not necessary to finding powerful learning experiences in the workplace. And in any job situation, leaders need to seek out or strengthen relationships with bosses, mentors and peers that will contribute to their own growth in leadership.

The Amplifier Effect

What about coursework and training? Although this is seen as contributing just 10 percent to a leader's development, well-designed coursework and training have an amplifier effect — clarifying, supporting and boosting the other 90 percent of your learning. For example, a program module that incorporates tools and experiential practice sessions can help managers become more effective learners and leaders. Skilled training specialists can help an organization establish a shared knowledge base and align its members with respect to a common leadership vision.

The Message

Through developmental assignments, you can shape your work and life experiences in ways that will expand your leadership knowledge and skills. Ideally, your organizations will build systems and processes that help upcoming leaders make the most of the 70-20-10 rule.

Meanwhile, what can you do? Set the example by investing in your own development and helping direct reports to do the same.