

7 Reasons Why Leadership Development Programs Fail & What To Do About It



It's no secret that quality of leadership directly affects an organization's success.

In the book *Built to Last*, Jim Collins and Jerry Porras showed that companies consistently focused on building strong organizational culture over a period of several decades outperformed companies that did not by a factor of six and outperformed the general stock market by a factor of 15.

On the other hand, ineffective leadership is having just as much of an impact on business results.

According to a Gallup survey of over 195,000 US employees,

→ **75%** of employees say their boss is the most stressful part of their job,

→ **65%** of employees say they would take a new boss over a pay raise, and

→ **40%** of employees quit because they can't get along with their boss.

It's no wonder that investing in leaders and organizational culture has become a \$166 billion dollar industry in the US alone. But even with the extensive amount of quality information, resources, tools and programs available most leadership development programs are failing to produce long-term, sustainable results.

With over 30 years in the people business and the most recent focused specifically on developing leaders and building leadership dream teams, I have observed seven of the most common reasons why leadership development programs fail to produce a sustainable ROI and what companies should do to avoid them.

ONE

Most leadership programs focus only on skillset, and it's not enough.



While a successful leadership development program involves developing a new or expanded set of competencies, learning new skills alone is not enough. Under stress, leaders revert to old habits and patterns of behavior. No set of tricks, tips, formulas, or strategies will produce long term, sustainable leadership behavior change.

"Who you are is how you lead, and how you lead determines the culture & success of your team and organization."

It is only when the old mindset is uncovered and a new mindset developed that a leader can confidently and sustainably transform. Who you are is how you lead. How you think, what you believe, what you value, how you are naturally wired, your life experiences and the stories

you tell yourself about those life experiences influence the way you lead. Effective leadership development programs that produce lasting leadership growth must include both the 'who' (mindset) and the 'how' (skillset) of great leadership.

TWO

There's a disconnect between leadership development knowledge and day-to-day business application.

One of the most common reasons a leadership development initiative can fail is the lack of relevance to the business. Many development programs fail to connect the dots between the business goals and how leadership development will help to achieve those goals. Therefore, many of the leaders participating in a development program see the business goals and leadership training as two completely separate activities.

In addition, the theoretical concepts of great leadership often taught in a program aren't adequately translated into how to apply the theory on a day-to-day basis in the operating of the business. Closing the gap in these two areas, clarifying how leadership development ties into the overall business objectives and how theories of leadership can be applied practically in the business, is a very important part of creating a successful leadership development initiative.



THREE

Senior leaders who don't participate undermine the effectiveness of a leadership development initiative.

Surprisingly, one of the most common causes of failure of a leadership development program is the lack of participation from the executives and senior leaders. When an organization commits to transforming its leadership culture, but the executives don't feel they need to be part of the process, regardless of the reason, it sends the remaining leadership team two messages:

1 The development program isn't important enough for me as an executive to commit time to it.

2 I am already a great leader and don't need additional training.



When the program gets underway and the participating leaders begin to get a true picture of what great leadership should be, it inadvertently shines a spotlight on the gaps in the leadership effectiveness of the executives.

The 'integrity gap' this new leadership standard creates can easily undermine the effectiveness of the overall leadership development initiative. The "do as I say, not as I do" leadership style doesn't work because more is often caught than taught. When it comes to how people learn leadership, an effective program will include the buy-in, participation and modeling of great leadership by the executive and senior level leaders.

FOUR

Leadership development must include a 'group' component or it lacks sustainability.

Leadership development is often conducted individually with each leader. A thorough individual leadership development program will offer a 360 leadership effectiveness survey of the leader and subsequent coaching and skill development to equip the leader to grow. While this has proven to be an extremely effective method of development, training leaders individually is not enough to transform the leadership culture of an organization.



To truly transform a leadership team's effectiveness, the leaders must learn, practice, and grow individually and together. The collective group learning creates an elevated environment of sustainability for the leadership program. This combination of individual and collective learning and development increases peer to peer trust, communication, accountability, creates a safe environment for practice and feedback, and promotes a positive culture of leadership that engages and motivates the entire workforce of an organization.

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FIVE

It's a myth that leadership development is not measurable.

In business, we tend to measure everything from revenue, profit, expenses and sales growth to employee turnover, product quality, safety, customer service, productivity and efficiency. When it comes to leadership development initiatives, however, companies often miss the mark on measurement. They know leadership development is important and that the quality of leadership affects business results, so they implement a development program and then "hope for the best." Unfortunately, all too often the skills taught in a development program do not appear to directly translate to a business metric. This couldn't be further from the truth.



FIVE

Measurement is an extremely important part of ensuring a leadership development program is producing the desired results. Leaders want to win and, in order to know whether they are winning, they need a way to keep score. There are several ways a company can measure the effectiveness of a leadership development initiative:

Business Metrics & Key Performance Indicators:

Take a snapshot of the most important business metrics & key performance indicators before and after the development program to determine how it has influenced the business.

Organizational Culture:

Organizational culture is driven by the underlying values held by the leaders and employees. A cultural values assessment quantifies the level of health or entropy of the organization; it can also be measured before and after a leadership development initiative.

Leadership Culture:

Surveys that measure the overall leadership culture before and after a program will demonstrate the level of growth, transformation and effectiveness of the leadership team.

Employee Engagement:

Capture the before and after levels of employee engagement to measure the impact of the leadership development program on employees.

Leadership Effectiveness 360:

Individual leadership effectiveness assessments can be conducted at the beginning and end of a leadership development initiative to determine the level of growth of an individual leader.

Regardless of the tools used, the importance of measurement cannot be understated. While leadership development is a journey and not necessarily a destination, every leader and every leadership team benefits from having 'markers' along the way to measure the progress of their journey.

SIX

Leaders who don't learn to coach will not be successful in leading diverse generations.

Leadership development programs that are perpetually dependent on a facilitator to teach content to every leader in the organization ultimately fail to create sustainability because they aren't equipping those leaders to become coaches and mentors themselves. With the ever growing population of millennials in the workforce who highly value coaching and mentoring, it is becoming an even more important aspect of effective leadership than ever before. High quality leadership development programs set the leader up for success by providing them with the mindset and

skillset to be effective coaches and mentors. While leaders do not have to become a certified coach in order to be an effective leader, they do benefit greatly from mastering key coaching competencies that will positively shape their leadership presence, enable them to build high levels of trust, create safety and possibilities thinking, and champion employees to maximize their potential. Learning the coaching mindset and skillset also equips leaders to more effectively build the bench of future leadership. Leaders developing leaders should be the ultimate goal of any development program.



“Learning the coaching mindset and skillset enables a leader to more effectively build the bench of future leadership.”

SEVEN

Leaders who don't want to be leaders won't fully invest themselves in development.



A key area where leadership development programs fail is including leaders in the program who really don't want to be leaders in the first place. It isn't uncommon that people end up in positions of leadership because they were really great employees. Maybe they were extremely hard working and dedicated. Or maybe they were extremely proficient technically in their roles as an individual contributor. So, the employee is promoted into a position of leadership. Once in the position, the new leader realizes the skills needed to be great at leading are far different from the skills necessary to be successful in their previous role.

Once the company begins to notice that the new leader is not as successful as they were in their previous position they decide to enroll them in training. The new leader comes into the training program only partially invested, because they are stressed in their new role and are not sure they even want to be a leader. For that leader, the program fails because of a lack of desire, commitment, and engagement. Therefore, it is important for decisions of selection

and promotion into leadership to include more than the past performance of an employee and an assumption that they want to grow into leadership. Fully understanding how an employee is naturally wired, their areas of giftings and occupational interests, and the employee's desired career goals, along with historical performance, are essential in order to ensure the leadership development program will be valuable for each leader.

The success of an organization is directly tied to how effectively the leaders are leading. While there is significant value in a high-quality leadership development program to transform culture and achieve business growth, these seven areas must be proactively addressed in order to protect a company's investment and prevent potential failure. By ensuring that a leadership development initiative includes the solution to these risk areas, a company can be confident in making the investment and will enjoy more long-term, sustainable results.

To learn more about how to develop coach approach leaders and build your own leadership dream team, click below:

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Alissa DeWitt, MCC, CPC, CERS, is the Founder, CEO & Executive Coach at Executive Impact, an organization dedicated to developing leaders and building leadership dream teams. With over 30 years in the people business and using the "Coach Approach to Leadership," Alissa and her team are passionate about elevating leadership effectiveness, transforming leadership teams, and accelerating business results.

