

# Strategic commentary

## The four secrets behind a successful leadership training programme

*Thought leaders share their views on the HR profession and its direction for the future*

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Effective leadership training requires careful planning. Samantha Caine, Client Services Director at Business Linked Teams shares the secrets to a successful programme.

Today's organisations require agile leaders that can confidently lead through the ever-changing myriad of contemporary business challenges. There are plenty for those in leadership positions to contend with, from global and technological disruption to the ever-changing goalposts of regulation and compliance, managing competencies, recruiting the right talent and other uncertainties such as political instability.

As the demands placed upon today's workforce continue to shift, businesses must ensure that aspiring leaders are learning the new behaviours that they require to thrive. Here are the four best kept secrets to building the most successful leadership training programme possible.

### **1. Build it around your business strategy**

Without question, the single most important driver behind your leadership training programme should be your business strategy.

Businesses will only succeed and grow if they have the best leaders with the right skills and capabilities that make them able to implement it.

In practical terms, this means that the content of any leadership development programme should be directly linked to what leaders need to deliver for their business. For example, if your business strategy is about long-term innovation, you may want to ask whether your leaders are able to innovate themselves? And then you may want to consider whether that is the most important thing or is it more important that they have the skills and processes to inspire and enable their teams to be innovative? Do they understand the organisational culture that is required to foster an innovative environment and can they create that for their teams?

Being able to recognise and identify what skills leaders actually need to implement business strategy is not always obvious. It is key to remember that no leader can implement a strategy themselves – it is about identifying what skills they need to enable others to do it.

### **2. Tailor everything**

Generic leadership programmes are everywhere in every format, and

fundamentally the content is the same from one to the other. The key to a truly successful leadership training programme is tailoring the content and applying it to the business' own operating environment, customers, products and processes.

For example, when you are training leaders how to coach, do not just cover a generic coaching model; show them how it fits in the context of your business's performance management process and give participants the opportunity to try out coaching within the very same framework. Challenge yourself to make sure that happens and identify the theoretical coaching steps that they need to go through; leaders know where to find development opportunities for their people in your organisation, so they understand how their coaching efforts contribute to the overall succession plan for the business.

In the same example, even when it comes to developing activities, make sure your role plays are reflective of the jobs and people that they will have to coach, to make sure that all of the learning opportunities are relevant and reflect the real world

### **3. Use your best people to support the delivery**

One of the biggest mistakes that businesses make is to overlook the vast wealth of leadership expertise

that they already have within the organisation. No one knows your people, processes, products, customers and challenges better than the people that are dealing with them on a daily basis and their expertise should be leveraged for the benefit of others.

For sure, you may not have expert leadership trainers and facilitators within your ranks but you do have very specialist stories and experiences that can be integrated within your leadership training. The very best leadership programmes are a seamless collaboration between external leadership trainers and internal experts, who can help to bring content alive and to position it in the context of jobs that the leaders do today and will need to do in the future.

### **4. Make it a journey not an event**

When developing a leadership training programme, it is all too easy to get swept up with the content and the practicalities. It is often a high profile project, with senior management's eyes on it, so questions about guest speakers and impressive locations find themselves towards the top of the agenda, as those responsible for developing the training seek to make an impact.

The trouble with this approach is that the essence of why there is a leadership training programme in the

first place is lost. Developers forget that this is not about an exciting event and great photos and feedback reports at the end of the event. Any leadership training programme (and by that we mean face-to-face workshop) is simply part of a much longer leadership development journey and it is essential that it has a long-term impact.

No one attends a training programme and becomes a great leader overnight – training programmes are simply interventions along the way and inputs of theory and practical skills that contribute to a leader's toolbox. Your challenge in developing a truly effective programme is to make sure that the opportunities for development reach far beyond the limited amount of classroom time that you have allocated.

A successful leadership training solution should incorporate self-study, line manager coaching, peer support groups and regularly adjusted training plans. In essence, it is about developing a programme that enables continuous leadership development, long after the trainer has packed up the flipchart and gone home.

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