

# CHIEF LEARNING OFFICER®

Solutions for Enterprise Productivity

## 2014

LEARNINGELITE



- **Leaders of the LearningElite**
- **McDonald's:** Making Learning Personal
- **IBM:** Change Is a Way of Life
- **P&G:** Learning Is the Business
- **The Vanguard Group:** Learning Is a Cultural Imperative



## Accenture

2014 Learning Organization  
of the Year

# Teaching by Example



**W**riting this column for the June issue of *Chief Learning Officer* magazine is always fun for me. It's my chance each year to congratulate the organizations whose exemplary workforce development initiatives earned them the prestigious LearningElite designation. It's also a bit challenging.

Each year, I strive to find a new way to articulate my admiration, as well as acknowledge the impact and accomplishments of these enterprises that make learning a key factor in their organizations' formula for success. While looking for fresh inspiration this time, I came across the perfect quote from Albert Einstein:

"Example isn't another way to teach, it is the only way to teach."

## There's a great deal we can learn from the 2014 LearningElite.

First of all, I couldn't think of a better human example than Einstein to cite in this case. Talk about someone who understood the focus and determination needed to meet and master challenges and reach full potential.

Einstein began his professional life facing some of the same challenges many 21st century job seekers and employers do today, like underemployment. He trained as a teacher in physics and mathematics, but after receiving his diploma, he was unable to find a teaching post. Needing to work, he accepted a position as a technical assistant in the Swiss patent office.

It was during his time at the patent office, and in his spare time, that he produced much of his groundbreaking work. Eventually he earned his doctorate, becoming a professor at several European universities. In 1921, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in physics. Twelve years later, he came to the U.S. to become professor of theoretical physics at Princeton University.

According to his official biography published in "Nobel Lectures, Physics 1901-1921," "Einstein always appeared to have a clear view of the problems of physics and the determination to solve them. He had a strategy of his own and was able to visualize the main stages on the way to his goal. He regarded his major achievements as mere stepping-stones for the next advance."

Simply shift the emphasis from physics to delivering effective workforce development, and it's easy to see how Einstein's approach to his work was characterized

by many of the same attributes that LearningElite organizations possess: focus, determination, strategy, vision and a commitment to continuous improvement. True innovators, they meet the changing needs of their organizations by repeatedly developing and deploying elite learning and development practices that deliver measurable business value.

For 2014, we received a record-breaking number of applications — clear evidence of the LearningElite's growing stature. In just four years, it has become the industry's most valuable benchmarking tool and a widely acknowledged mark of distinction.

Fifty-eight enterprises emerged as LearningElite finalists by demonstrating excellence in learning strategy, learning execution, learning impact, business performance results and leadership commitment. Two additional companies in the vanguard of enterprise education — AT&T and General Mills — were named to the LearningElite Winner's Circle, a special designation separate from the annual rankings reserved for returning elite organizations that previously were ranked No. 1.

One of the main goals of this benchmarking effort is to make examples of the companies that achieve LearningElite status. Rather than just recognizing top-notch learning and development organizations, it seeks to spread best practices so every enterprise can leverage learning as a business driver and competitive differentiator. And when it comes to teaching by example, there's certainly a great deal we can learn from the 2014 LearningElite companies profiled in this issue.

Another famous Albert, also a Nobel Prize winner and Einstein contemporary, expressed similar thoughts on being an example, equating it with leadership. Philosopher, physician and humanitarian Albert Schweitzer said, "Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing."

It is our hope that the inspiring stories inside from the 2014 LearningElite will serve as examples that not only teach you a thing or two about high-impact workforce development but also influence you to aspire to join them. [CLO](#)

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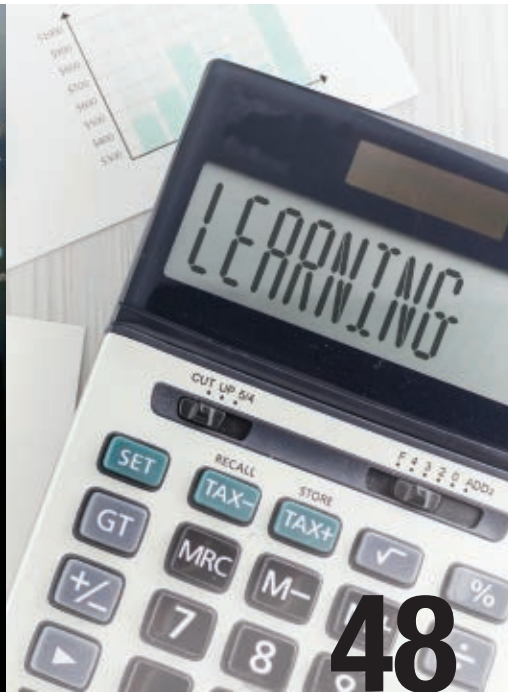
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Each week, we compile a list of the top five stories on CLOmedia.com as well as the week's top business and industry news so you can catch up on what your peers are reading.

Look for this section in every Friday's newsletter, or visit us on the Web and tell us what you're reading at **[CLOmedia.com/blogs/5-the-week-that-was](http://CLOmedia.com/blogs/5-the-week-that-was)**.



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# The Problem With Leadership Development

BY GORDON CURPHY, ROBERT HOGAN AND ROBERT B. KAISER

If leadership programs do not produce the bench strength, performance and behaviors desired, one or more of six problems could be the culprit.

During the past two decades, learning executives have persuaded U.S. corporations to double their annual spending on various forms of leadership development to \$14 billion. Yet over that same period, public confidence in leadership has dropped considerably. According to a 2012 poll by The Center for Public Leadership at Harvard University, 70 percent of Americans believe there is a leadership crisis that will lead to a national decline unless we find better leaders.

Many leaders, including some in the learning profession, recognize the problem. A 2011 survey by consultancy Development Dimensions International Inc. of 14,320 executives reported that 38 percent of line leaders and 25 percent of HR leaders gave their organizations high ratings for leadership and only 32 percent and 18 percent, respectively, thought their organizations had the necessary bench strength to meet future business needs.

That leadership development is broken seems to be an open secret. In a 2013 survey by research firm Brandon Hall Group of 329 organizations, 75 percent of respondents described their leadership development programs as ineffective. What accounts for this disconnect between money spent on leadership development and leadership performance?

## A Way Out of Darkness

Six problems undermine leadership learning and development initiatives, and these problems flow from deeply held convictions reinforced by so-called best practices.

**The evaluation problem.** It is a dirty little secret that leadership development programs are rarely evaluated in a meaningful way. They are typically evaluated by asking participants how much they liked or benefited from it, or by using metrics such as how many directors received 360 feedback, how many managers

watched an e-learning module and so on. But the real question is whether programs produce positive changes in behavior and financial results.

Thousands of leadership development programs are delivered in the U.S. every year, but a 2009 review article by Bruce Avolio and colleagues published in

Most leadership programs are taught in inappropriate ways. They tend to be events with little follow-up support or accountability for transferring learning back to the job.

*The Leadership Quarterly* could only locate the results of 200 programs that were formally evaluated. Two-thirds of these programs were found to have positive outcomes. Because these programs likely were better designed and delivered than those not evaluated, the overall failure rate for the typical leadership program is probably higher than 1 in 3.

Learning leaders normally use evaluations to justify return on investment, but evaluations also can be used to improve programs. Without formal evaluation, many programs will use questionable methods, and no industry is more susceptible to fads than leadership development.

**The definition problem.** Evaluation requires spec-



ifying desired outcomes, and this requires defining leadership correctly. Unfortunately, leadership is most often defined by a position — Marissa Mayer is the leader of Yahoo Inc., or the senior vice president of marketing is the leader of that group. This confuses status in organizations with leadership, and many senior managers are better at promoting their careers than they are at leading.

Competency models also can be used to define leadership. But competency models are idiosyncratic lists of skills and abilities composed by asking senior managers what is needed to lead in particular jobs. Because few senior managers are good leaders, asking them about effective leadership is like asking a doctor for investment advice. He or she probably has an opinion, but it may not be a good one.

Teams are the building blocks of organizations. The essence of leadership is persuading individuals to work together to achieve a common goal. Thus, many believe leadership should be defined as the ability to build and guide teams that outperform the competition. Leadership development programs should be constructed from this perspective and should be evaluated in terms of whether they help leaders build high-performing teams.

**The people problem.** Many of the people who attend leadership development programs are drawn to high-status and high-paying leadership positions, but they have little talent for leading a team. These people fall into three broad types: savvy politicians who can play the game; technically competent individual contributors; and ambitious people who are also arrogant, defensive, incapable of self-reflection, and not open to learning and growing. As a result, many people who attend leadership development programs lack the motivation and interest to do the hard work and learn how to lead a high-performing team.

Organizations need to rethink who they send to leadership development programs. They should focus on identifying individuals with people skills who are also team-oriented, results-driven and curious learners. It would also help to screen out self-promoters, satisfied technical experts and those unable to change.

**The content problem.** Little of what is taught in leadership programs concerns the actual tasks of leader-

ship. Courses are often based on competency models which, in addition to being ad hoc, rarely concern how to build teams that get results. A review of the most popular, commercially available competency models shows they almost never include competencies specifically about getting results through teams. The same is true for the home-grown competency models used in most organizations.

Nonetheless, people in positions of authority often struggle to staff teams, launch virtual teams, fix dysfunctional teams, and align competing interests and egos. Focusing leadership development efforts on these team concerns is essential if programs are to have a demonstrable impact on results.

**The pedagogy problem.** Most leadership programs are taught in inappropriate ways. They tend to be events with little follow-up support or accountability for transferring learning back to the job. Further, research summarized by author Malcolm Gladwell in his book “Outliers” shows that developing expertise — in writing fiction, figure skating or leading — requires 10,000 hours of practice, far more than a one-day seminar, weeklong training program or two-year MBA. Worse, leadership programs are often taught by HR staff, talent managers and consultants — individual contributors with no real leadership experience — which makes it difficult to translate theory into practice.

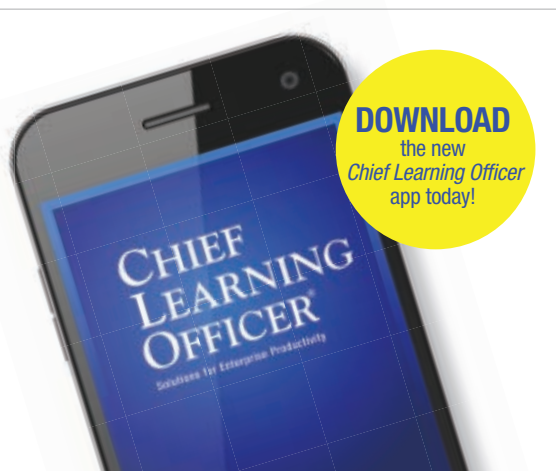
There are four ways to improve leadership training. First, reinforce learned lessons back on the job. For example, reporting back to the participants’ bosses, having a clearly defined action plan and periodically reviewing progress will add support and accountability. Second, provide learning environments that allow experimentation and practicing new skills with real-team feedback. Third, use teachers who have track records for building high-performing teams. Fourth, involve intact teams together in the learning and development process.

**The rationale problem.** Leadership development programs are often launched for questionable reasons: A CEO decides a leadership book is the key to organizational salvation. Someone thinks the organization needs a leadership development program to teach “best practices.” Or a senior manager wants a coach as a perk after reaching a certain level. Although these programs cost millions of dollars, they rarely improve organizational results or leadership bench strength.

To get the best return on investment, start leadership programs for at least one of three reasons: to help leaders learn how to develop the strategies and tactics needed to beat the competition; to help leaders learn how to build and maintain a team; or to improve team dynamics and results.

## Where Do We Go From Here?

The shortfall in leadership talent will continue unless learning leaders change their approach to lead-



ership development. CLOs are uniquely positioned to drive this change because they are responsible for talent development, they understand the mechanics of adult learning and they control leadership development budgets. The following recommendations are not expensive but do require learning leaders to think differently about leader development.

**1. Clearly define leadership.** Organizations need a clear definition of leadership to organize their development efforts. If leadership is defined as the ability to build teams that outperform the competition, this definition has specific implications for how to hire, develop and promote leadership talent.

**2. Build better competency models.** Organizations should build competency models either by observing what distinguishes leaders with track records for building high-performing teams or by interviewing these leaders. Including those who are not proven team builders muddies the waters.

**3. Rethink who attends leadership programs.** Well-validated assessment tools can be used to identify those with the right motivation, interest and talent for leadership. These tools also can be used to screen out those who are not likely to benefit from the training.

**4. Offer programs on teams.** Most leadership programs nibble around the edges of team development. They often concern goal setting, communication, coaching, delegation and performance management as applied to direct reports with no concern for how the concepts work with teams.

**5. Teach intact teams.** Because teams are the building blocks of organizations, leadership development programs should target intact teams rather than isolated individual leaders. This is particularly true for teams critical to driving the business strategy.

**6. Resist the magnetic pull of fads.** Far too many leadership development programs are based on the latest fad. Programs should be aligned with an organization's definition of leadership, business strategy and the knowledge, behaviors and skills needed to guide teams to execute that strategy. Everything else is just noise.

**7. Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate.** Although the effect of some leadership development initiatives is more easily studied than others, all programs should be evaluated in terms of meaningful outcomes. The outcomes should focus on the skills, behaviors and competencies individual leaders need to build a high-performing team as well as team performance. **CLO**

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**BUSINESS** continued from page 51

tent reporting helps learning executives manage the function better and deliver greater organizational value. It also gives them the tools to take the learning conversation upstairs.

To track and compare various measures, the TDRp work recommends three standard monthly statements based on effectiveness, efficiency and outcome. While these are intended primarily for the individual functions of HR, the outcome statement has particular value because it shows the alignment of learning's goals and achievements with those of the organization.

These statements summarize findings and add year-end forecasting. The first is a quarterly, high-level summary report. Intended as a standalone piece for senior leaders, this concise briefing distills past, current and projected data for each critical measure, including effect on the most important strategic goals, with a focus on conclusions and actionable recommendations.

The second and third types of report are generated monthly for the department head to use in managing the learning function. The operations report focuses on effectiveness and efficiency measures across all company learning programs, while individual program reports track outcome, effectiveness and efficiency measures in support of each initiative or company goal.

Armed with this type of reporting, learning executives can clearly articulate the effect of development decisions on business objectives, and begin to predict those effects more accurately. Leaders can pinpoint and discuss opportunities for improvement, approaching Pease's final, optimization stage of the continuum. And by delivering the rigorous quantitative analysis expected of a business, the learning function can claim a strong voice in any discussion of strategy.

Unfortunately, efforts to provide comprehensive, executive-ready reporting on talent development remain in their early stages. The Society for Human Resource Management recently launched an initiative to define key HR measures and practices, and hundreds of organizations have begun to implement TDRp standards. But their efforts merely outline how far learning has yet to travel.

Yet at each step of the journey, better standards, tools, data, analysis, reporting and management bring real benefits. Those improvements will be noticed. Inevitably, learning will one day be run like a business, with a consistent focus on metrics that support broader business objectives. This will fundamentally change how investments in human capital are managed and perceived. **CLO**

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