

The Essentials of Leadership Development

By Leadership Network

Russ Bredholdt is a consultant to both profit and nonprofit organizations, including judicatories and congregations. He is also a member of Leadership Network's Church Champions' Editors Board. Two weeks ago, during Coaches Week in Atlanta, he summarized his recent study on the essentials of leadership development. For two years, as part of a multi-client study, Bredholt examined the subject of leadership development. The purpose of the study was to see what, if any, were the differences between the popular subject of leadership and the concept of leadership development.

According to Bredholt, most of his clients' thinking on the subject of leadership development had been limited to the latest best-selling book or seminar. All were definitely interested in leadership, but the context of the discussions had been primarily the individual. As he discovered in the study, effective leadership development must be placed in the context of a group purpose of which leadership then becomes an important subtopic.

The principles identified in the study have application for churches and religious organizations as well. We thank Russ for his work and permission to share with the readers of EXPLORER some of the highlights and key findings.

A DEFINITION OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Our working definition of leadership development was "an intentional effort to provide leaders and emerging leaders with opportunities to learn, grow and change." Its purpose is "to produce individuals over time with the skills to function effectively within the organization." (The Lessons of Experience)

KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IS SEEN BY THOSE WHO PRACTICE IT WELL AS A KEY STRATEGIC PRIORITY, NOT AN APPENDAGE TO EVERYTHING ELSE.

It is a missional issue, not a human resources issue, or a time and budget casualty.

2. THE CAPACITY TO DEVELOP LEADERS BEGINS WITH A STRONG SENSE OF ORGANIZATIONAL DEFINITION.

Identity is who you are and built on one's beliefs as opposed to image or what other people think about you. Since we are trying to develop people and help them function successfully within a specific organizational culture, group identity is very important. This is foundational to effective leadership development.

Organizational definition is more than a mission statement. It is what makes the group unique or different. It is what lies at the core of everything, even if it is unspoken by the members of the group. It is somewhat like a secret code. So often, the passion is missing because

people are trying to inculcate something that belongs to someone else and there is little or no attempt at self-discovery. Clarity of your organizational definition is essential, especially in times of major transition and change.

3. THE CORE ISSUE OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IS FOUND IN THE PURPOSE OF THE GROUP.

Leaders, even entrepreneurs, must function with other people. Therefore, leadership development is best understood in the context of the particular group to which a leader or emerging leader belongs.

4. THERE IS AN INHERENT TENSION BETWEEN THE VALUES OF THE ORGANIZATION AND THE INDIVIDUAL.

Organizations, like people, have values. To be effective in an organization, a person's values must be compatible with the organization's values. They do not need to be the same, but they must be close enough to co-exist. The goal is to develop both and manage the tension that is inherent rather than to pit one against the other. What is often best for

the organization is not best for the individual and vice versa. The last thing we need, or want, are robots. This is where a leader can miss the point when someone disagrees with them. They fail to understand that people can differ and still reside in the same tent as long as the overall values are compatible and complementary. Effective leaders know how to be discreet with their thoughts in settings with others.

5. LIFE IS A DEVELOPER OF LEADERS.

The notion that people develop, whether it is planned or not, is instructive. We discovered that a common perception is to think that a leader has to be in a formal program in order to develop. Our tendency is to want to control things, including people. The study indicates that we should be spending time molding the clay, not controlling it.

6. IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE THAT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT IMPROVING PERFORMANCE/RESULTS WITH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, NOT TRYING TO CHANGE HOW SOMEONE IS WIRED.

Too much time is wasted on trying to change an individual's composition rather than focusing on developing their unique abilities and talents.

7. FINALLY, THE INDIVIDUAL IS ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR DEVELOPMENT.

As much as we have emphasized group context and formal programs, ultimately the individual is responsible for his or her own development. We have a major responsibility to help people know how to learn.

LEARNING IS EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE

Learning has three categories and they are not all weighted equally. Additionally, we must clarify the distinction between education and

training. While they are related, they are not the same thing. Each has a different premise and a different outcome.

Education is focused on the individual first and the organization second. Its purpose is to draw out the learner, to help the individual develop their ability to learn and to learn how to think for themselves. Education exposes the learner to different points of view as opposed to a single perspective.

Training is focused on the organization first and the individual second. Its purpose is to equip the learner with the skill or skills to do a particular job or task. With training, the end is known. Training also assumes a right and wrong way to do something.

Experience uses both education and training and may involve starting something from scratch, fixing something or a turn-around situation. It might include assuming increased responsibility, or assignment to a special project or task. It may often involve hardships.

Education and training, if properly understood, can help us learn more from our experiences. The greatest teacher of all, experience, receives little attention. According to the research, 70 percent of all learning involves experience. Experience alone, however, is not sufficient. The value of experience lies in both what kind of experience you have and what you take away from it. Not all experiences are created equal. In leadership development, the challenge is to be aware of certain kinds of experiences that tend to contribute the most to a leader's development. Additionally, we found that colleagues, friends, spouses, coaches and mentors aid leaders through their experiences. However, few people have a mentor and most do not have a coach. That leaves it to the others to provide help along the way.

For those who might be concerned at this point about too much secular thinking in our approach to leadership development, it is important to acknowledge the significance and distinctiveness of spiritual growth. Understanding the purposes of God, working out one's faith in actual situations, and mastery of spiritual disciplines are essential. One could argue that spiritual growth comes through education, training and experience, all hallmarks of becoming a disciple, or a lifelong learner. Dr. Robert Clinton has written extensively about the phases of a leader's development and notes the sovereignty of our Lord in how someone grows and develops as a leader.

OBJECTIVES OF AN EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

An effective leadership development program has three objectives. One is to define leadership development within the unique context of the organization and its culture and mission. A second objective is to identify the organization's leadership development needs and match the solution to the need. Finally, an effective program of leadership development helps individuals learn about themselves and others, grow in their personal

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skills and abilities, and change and adapt to new circumstances and opportunities.