6 REASONS LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS DON'T WORK – AND HOW TO MAKE SURE YOURS DOES!

DLPA

SUMMARY

Itis true that many leadership development programs do not deliver the results they promise, or indeed renderno meaningful results at all. We believe that there are six key reasons this occurs. Through actively managing these reasons you can ensure your program is a success.

Introduction

It seems like every time we present a proposal the potentialclient will look at us with an almost accusatory look and say, "Why do most leadership programs fail?". The insinuation being that ours would fail as well. From our perspective the answer is very simple - it is usually a complex failure, meaning the interface between several components fails which creates subsequent and continuous failures. There are many moving parts in coordinated programs, and if they are not 'coordinated' then you have disparate action which may or may not work.
If you are going to go to the expense of running a leadership program in your organisation there are several areas you need to assess and continue to monitor throughout the life of the program in order to ensure success.

6 Reasons

REASON 1: **Lack ofseniormanagement buy-in**

REASON 2: **Toxic culture**

REASON 3: **Poor quality program content**

REASON 4: **Poor facilitation and delivery**

REASON 5: **Wrong people in leadership roles**

REASON 6: **The business model is broken**

Use our checklist to ensure your leadership program delivers exceptional and sustainable results.

REASON 1: LACK OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT BUY-IN

Often times we are called to quote for works which would involve developing middle managers only, and the senior leadership do not wish to participate. We politely decline to quote for this work, as we've found time and again that the lack of senior management buy-in or active interest in the development of their leaders is the quickest way to sabotage the outcome of a program. The senior managers will be responsible for leading the change and coordinating the day to day actions that come out of a leadership development program. If they are not committed to the program and its success, it is almost certain it will fail. Team members need to see that senior managers support the initiative in order to fully participate in

it themselves. Beyond that, the changes must be lived within the work environment and the new skills practiced every day for any meaningful change to occur. Senior management need to be encouraging this behavioral change to create a supportive environment for staff to flourish.

If staff receive training, coaching or other development activities and return to a workplace that is not embracing change, or does not actively support them in their growth they will likely feel isolated and frustrated. These staff members will either go back to 'same old, same old' or leave the organisation and take their new skills to your competitor.

REASON 2: TOXIC CULTURE

Sometimes organisations realise they need to develop leaders because the lack of leadership is being evidenced by a toxic culture. Depending how far you have descended into the toxicity it may not be advisable to launch into a leadership development program before doing some cultural work to build an environment that is going to support change. For example, if you have a culture that punishes any form of risk taking, that focuses solely on the individual or that rewards outcome in an 'anything goes' type environment there is going to be such negative affectation that the culture needs to be addressed before developing leaders to pioneer

change. The need for cultural change and the need for strong leadership are often compressed into the one problem. The reality is they are different problems that require different skillsets to solve. If you have a toxic culture you likely need some form of turnaround specialist to intervene prior to commencing a leadership development program.
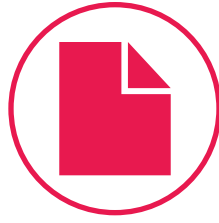
REASON 3: POOR QUALITY PROGRAM CONTENT

We have to be upfront about this one - there are some really lack lustre products on market (and sometimes they come in a really shiny box). A poor quality program would obviously be unlikely to deliver meaningful change. And to be fair, most of the poor quality programs we have seen are delivered with the best of intentions. It may be that the provider has taken a 'one-size fits all' approach and not taken the time to get to know the challenges of the individual business. It may be that the provider is not across the commercial realities of the business, so provides solutions that are more academic in nature. Or it may simply be that the program is just not very good.

The content and sequencing of a program is critical to its success. The skills must be taught and then embedded in an order that supports the participants through the change, and provides the best platform for them to test and explore new ideas. The content of the program should be responsive to the group and customised to their scope of reference.

REASON 4: POOR FACILITATION AND DELIVERY

Ultimately the onus is on the facilitator to get everyone in the program participating, interested and engaged. Some providers do not do this very well, and of course the outcome of the program suffers as a result. Most commonly this is because the facilitator is not adaptive, and tries to pull the participants into their scope of reference. It is critical in facilitation that you meet the participants as they are, where they are, and convince them of the validity of the path forward that you are suggesting. Failure to do this will result in compromised outcomes, and if any change is achieved it is likely to be transient.

REASON 5: WRONG PEOPLE IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

More and more we are seeing people in leadership roles who are really not very interested in leading. In some companies we are seeing a high number of people more interested in the title and status of leadership roles, rather than actually doing that role. And whilst we do believe that every person can benefit from being a better leader, that doesn't necessarily mean that they should be in leadership roles. Leadership and direction for an organisation. If the people in those roles do not have a genuine interest in leading

the team, making the tough decisions and taking responsibility for the overall performance of the team then unfortunately the team is unlikely to thrive. You can work with people to become better leaders, but they may just not be capable of the level of change required, or making consistent decisions. Beyond that, there are of course technical aspects of leadership roles. If the person in the role is not the right fit for the role, or adequately skilled for the subject matter, then increasing their leadership skills really needs to take a backseat to increasing their core proficiency.

REASON 6: TRYING TO FIX THE BUSINESS MODEL WITH LEADERSHIP

Quite commonly we encounter businesses that blame poor organisational performance solely on the team and the lack of leadership. However, when examined, it becomes evident that the team is responding with negative behaviour because they are demoralised by a business model that just doesn't work. It is true that strong leaders can work to problem solve and create innovative new ways of doing business. It is also true that strong leaders are required to successfully implement a major change - such as restructuring. However, a leadership development program being run in a business that is fundamentally broken will not work. It is putting the cart before the horse, and will have very limited success.

HOW DO YOU RUN A SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM?

Leadership development programs can be a wonderful way to encourage and build your team, create more efficient and productive business units and ensure there is sufficient succession planning in place. Whilst many don't work as well as they could, or are not sustainable once the provider leaves, there are programs that work and provide huge return on investment to the organisation. Here's a checklist to ensure your program is a success:

☐ **Audit senior management's buy-in** Ensure that the senior managers are going to support the program, and be supportive of participants. It is ideal if they actually participate in the program.

☐ **Perform a Culture Assessment first** This serves two purposes. Firstly, if you identify a truly toxic culture, do not commence a leadership development program. Start by addressing the culture. Secondly, the assessment may be used to benchmark before, during and after to measure the success and effect of the program.

☐ **Get to know the provider first** You don't need to sign the provider up for a full 6-12 month program all at once. Try them for small bodies of work first so that you can get a feel for the overall quality of their work, and how they fit with your organisation.

☐ **Participate in the design of the program** Any quality provider should allow you to customise the program content to your needs and environment. Go through the program with the provider and make sure you are happy with the content. The provider should be open to making changes during the program to account for differences in the business context, or feedback from the participants.

☐ **Make sure you have selected the right people** Critically assess your leaders. Make sure that people are suitably qualified and skilled for the roles they are in, and assess whether they may need some other skill development prior to going down the leadership track.

☐ **Assess your business model** There are many causes for poor business performance. Make sure yours is sound before putting money into developing your leaders. The business model must be solid at its core first. Consider having a formal assessment of your business model by an external provider if you are in any way unsure.

For more information, feedback or support contact us at **info@dlpa.com.au**

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