

Leading Leaders – It's All About Alignment

I hear it all the time, “Corey, our executives are too busy, tightly scheduled or important to devote significant time and energy to a leadership development program - including their own development.”

I completely understand this statement and I get it. There is a long track record of executives not being exactly thrilled about putting time into learning programs or they are simply resistant to the concept. They have been through it before and mostly tend to remember the ones that were not so great in content or delivery. When you really think about it, this means that the push back really comes from misalignment. Because misalignment in this case is not clearly identified, the consequence is that any learning initiative will be looked at with low expectations right from the beginning.

As I have become familiar with this consistent roadblock in designing and developing learning that sticks, I have put my own best practices in critical and creative thinking to work. For learning programs to be successful and sustainable, they must be closely aligned to strategic goals of an organization in both content and delivery. Particularly for executive level participants, the delivery must be repetitive and flexible simultaneously.



What has been working with great success is what we call leadership development series (LDS). Our LDS programs are for C-Suite, VPs, Directors and Senior Managers who commit to their growth as a team or unit in the following framework: 2 to 3 hours a week each month for 5 to 6 months, otherwise referred to as 3 x 4 x 6 (3-hour sessions, 4 weeks per month, over a 6-month period).

The result of utilizing this framework is a learning experience that is aligned to their business and goes beyond experiential learning or 3-day workshop that is forgotten a week later. LDS's are powerful because they work within an executive's world of constant demands for their time yet allows them to make the commitment required for the organization and themselves to truly grow and adapt over time. This intense and immersive learning engagement has provided insightful feedback from the participants and links to four key categories:

1. Driving Force

The initial focus of the program is always on the organization's and the executive's driving force(s) and the alignment of the two. This context refreshes the leaders because they are rarely asked or given the time to explore these issues. Next, they document, debrief, and share their compelling purpose. In a constantly changing business environment, it is critical to constantly have these discussions as it forces communication and clarity and generates an openness to new ideas for personal and group success.

2. Path to Mastery

The next focus of the program is to develop a defined path to mastery (in this case leadership, but can be others), including an explicit definition of mastery of the leadership role. Following a similar

process to the compelling purpose, the group works on defining what it means to master their role and lays out a path to becoming more effective. They now have a reason for becoming great at their function and a viable means of building toward greatness.

3. Practical Practice

The Practical Practice segment stretches the participants to achieve mastery. This exercise involves many repetitions, in different contexts, of the key attitudes, behaviours, and skills needed for mastery and then requires the participants to apply those exercises to their own work. Practicing the exercises and adapting them begins the re-wiring process that is the basis for all learning. It is very hard for participants to feel like the learning exercise is not useful when the practical exercises require them to make it useful.

4. Applied Social Learning

The Social Learning is a challenge for some but drives home behaviour change. Participants use the “**Do-Document-Discuss-Document – 4D**” weekly cycle in which they complete customized exercises, journal new insights, discuss with their leadership partners, and then expand their journal entry. This process builds many repetitions of the key ideas and concepts so that the new attitudes and behaviors are fully internalized. More importantly, participants quickly realize that they are becoming better by doing real work, but with a new consciousness and a great group of supportive peers.

Why do senior leaders appreciate these programs so much? Confidence in the underlying science of learning, change and growth. It allows busy senior executives to begin the program with high expectations. The organization can be confident that the approach will drive mental and physical engagement as well as productivity. The leaders are expected to thrive, and they do.

So, the next time I hear you or someone say, “I’m too busy for that learning and development program,” I am very confident that we can take the conversation in a new direction. A direction that is really about alignment and aligned learning.

For more information about how we can bring our CSPN Leadership Development Series to your organization, email me at corey@mycspn.com

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Corey’s focus is to deliver meaningful and measurable strategies for organizations to harness team potential and create engaging leaders. With 20+ years in the learning, development and training industry, Corey is well known for his ability to connect with any audience at any size. He has provided participant focused learning and development design and consulting, professional speaking, coaching and training for organizations of all sizes across North America. He has a focused results-based partnership approach to develop and deliver customized solutions that meet an organization’s unique business needs and resolve their most significant issues, helping them to create a lasting competitive advantage.