

## **Get With The Times**

A number of popular ideas and approaches to leadership deserve to be tossed. Certain overused notions may have served us well in years past, but they simply do not fit with the current reality, nor do they work to develop the kinds of leaders who make a difference. Leadership development programs based on these models offer an appealing quick fix because they are simplistic and formulaic, but the truth is that there is no easy fix or short answer to leadership.

Leadership development has been rated as the number one priority over the next five years in a national survey of various organizations. However, 40% of senior executives expressed dissatisfaction with their leadership programs – simply because these programs are based on outdated models and faulty approaches.

Formulas, simple models and short-term programs waste money and time. The problem is twofold: not only are the ideas overly simplistic, but there is also a consistent gap between knowledge and behaviour change. Simply knowing something is not enough to produce changes. For example, people KNOW that they will lose weight by eating less and exercising more, but how often does this understanding produce the desired results? Sustaining lifestyle changes that create optimum health and weight is complex and individual, a reality entirely ignored by every quick-fix, fad-diet program. Leadership “diets” don’t work.

It is understandable that businesses struggle to make the long-term commitment necessary to produce lasting change in leadership effectiveness. It is much easier to sign up for a week-long workshop, read the latest best-seller or listen to a dynamic and trendy speaker. We tend to treat the symptoms of bad leadership or slap on simple/technical solutions. Who can manage anything more?

The question is: who can afford not to? It’s time for organizations to get with the times and stop investing in short-term, simplistic, flavour-of-the-month programs. More than wasteful, such programs can actually be destructive, creating cynicism. Investing in courses, particularly ones that generate initial excitement and encourage people to engage emotionally, then fail to produce results, can take a significant toll.

When interviewing managers during the initial phase of our work with organizations, we consistently hear skepticism about yet another new “program.” While people recognize and appreciate that the CEO or president wants to focus on leadership, past failures cast a shadow of doubt, and resistance can create a significant learning block. Until an organization is ready to make a long-term commitment to developing leaders effectively, it may be better off doing nothing at all. When the commitment finally comes, the organization can reap substantial benefits.

It’s time to take a cold, hard look at the reality of leadership and decide if you and your organization are up for the challenge. Creating lasting, significant improvements in leadership effectiveness requires a long-term commitment and demands a partnership

with experts in the field of leadership who are grounded in current research and experienced in business.

Real leadership development is about meeting people where they are, encouraging them to take risks, face failure, learn from mistakes, be transparent to others, accept and acknowledge their strengths, and deal with ambiguity and uncertainty. It is about engaging people on a very personal level, both individually and in relation to others. It is about a sustained personal voyage of discovery within the context of the dynamic, demanding world of work.

Learning to lead is not only about *what to do*, but perhaps more importantly, it is about *how to be*. Leading effectively demands the very best of who you are in service to the organization and its mission. You cannot go on a course to learn this. The retreat is just the beginning. It is the journey that will make a measurable, sustainable difference.

*Tips for organizations:*

- Leadership development must be owned and practiced by executive group.
- The retreat has to be the start of the conversation, followed by individual coaching, mentoring, reading, discussing, ongoing learning that is adapted to needs of organization, then back for another retreat.
- Let go of the mindset of the “quick fix” and commit to a longer-term solution.
- Beware of “models” that sound good but are actually simplistic and do little to address individual behaviour.
- Beware of those consultants who are invested in a program or model. Partner with those whose curriculum is dynamic and constantly evolving, those who are committed to staying abreast of best practices and are expert facilitators and coaches.
- Invest in *leaderful interventions* rather than fad programs that come and go.