SOME THINGS WE BELIEVE
ABOUT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

BY CARL M. RHODES
Chief Operating Officer, CorpU

There is ample evidence that leadership development isn’t working. Let’s change the outcome.
It’s Not Just You; This Could Be Going Better

Although much can be said about strengthening leadership, driving change, and shaping culture, this cannot be said: there hasn’t been enough attention, money, or extraordinarily devoted and talented people applied to these issues in the corporate world. On the contrary, in the last eighteen years alone, companies have spent extraordinary sums of money, devoted some of their best executives and staff, and allocated large amounts of scarce bandwidth attempting to do all three. Yet the results—known best to those leading the charge—are frustratingly inconsistent, whether company by company, over time within the same company, or in the aggregate. The type of leader companies crave remain in short supply, cultures are often described as dated or dysfunctional, and change feels like a constant and most unwelcome companion.

Why?

Select Works on the State of Leadership Development

- No shortage of money, effort, or extraordinary talent working on leadership development
- Inconsistent, disappointing, or unknown results
It’s Rough Out There

What’s driving these variable results? On one level, it is obvious: It’s tough sledding out there and it’s getting tougher all the time.

Every established, long-term macroeconomic, demographic, technological, geopolitical, or sociological trend has at least one thing in common—it’s making culture, leadership, and the ability to change with the outside world both more important and harder at the same time.

But, if the megatrends are clichés now—stated and restated ad nauseam—what is less commonly stated is what many intuitively sense. The challenges are intertwined. Solving one problem is reliant on solving the others.

Your leadership bench-strength issue is affecting your culture. Your culture is affected by your leaders, many would argue shaped by them. Your ability to change at the required pace is made or broken by your culture and your leaders. Each issue affects the other, and you need a strategy or set of approaches that make each one better at the same time, creating virtuous—not vicious—cycles between the three.

Failing to Use Our Best Tools

Making this environment even harder, we now know things and have access to new tools and technologies that most companies simply do not use at the same time in a coordinated way when developing their leaders.

For example, we know that to learn, adults need to consume information across multiple modalities and then make that information their own, through reflection, dialogue, and application.

We all use technology in our personal lives that enables both asynchronous and synchronous interactions with hundreds, even thousands, instantly around the globe. But at work, we read emails and fly to offsite trainings once a year.

The profession of B2C marketing mine our words online because they know they can use them to see inside—and then change—the hearts, minds, and ultimately the behavior of their would-be consumers. Yet organizations do not use these same techniques to understand—and connect with—their leaders or their employees as they go through change or learn new things.

The bottom line: we’re often tackling leadership development with our best tools left on the shelf.
We Believe Some Simple Things

At CorpU, we have come to believe 10 simple things about what is needed in leadership development.

1. **There’s a better way.**
   We believe that by combining new advances in knowledge, method, and technology, companies can strengthen leadership, shape culture, and drive change more effectively than they do now. Did we invent the wheel? Not at all. We’re borrowing the wheels created by many talents and applying them in a new way to vexing problems, but the results can be equally as powerful.

2. **You’re probably paying too much.**
   Are you flying hundreds of employees to offsite meetings every year to learn about new strategies? Are you sending executives to education programs at elite schools? Are you hiring elite consulting firms to help you navigate change? If so, we think you might be paying too much. Or at the very least, if you’re honest, you don’t have very good data on the return you’re getting on those investments.

3. **Treat them like the adult 21st-century consumers they are.**
   We need to treat leaders and rising leaders for what they are — modern consumers. That means creating content and experiences that are fun, fast, and simple, especially at work. And it means they learn through mixed modalities, spaced interventions, and application at work.

4. **Make it relevant to their job.**
   If you have programs that some in your organization deem a distraction from work, the game is lost. It must be about work and making work better—and easier—or it will fail to have impact.

5. **Go to the experts.**
   Is your company as vertically integrated as a Ford Motor circa 1910, making everything it needs itself? Of course not. No one else’s is either. Then why do some think they have to come up with all knowledge, information, and content for their leadership development programs? They can’t, and they shouldn’t. Instead, leverage the best minds in the world like you leverage the best of what the outside world can do for you in every other aspect of your business.
**Dialogue is the key.**

If you can get your employees talking in the right way, you can not only get them to truly understand, believe in, and apply ideas, but you can see something you have never seen before—what’s happening in their hearts and minds. And then track it over time.

**Measure, analyze, predict.**

With modern methods, technology, and analytics, you can: learn things about your employees’ knowledge, beliefs, and feelings; assess the impact of your interventions in new ways; track their behavior changes over time; and predict how your business might be affected. Not only can you, we believe you should, much like you would assess the impact of any other business-relevant initiative.

**You have to use technology.**

To develop and change human beings scattered around the globe at scale and speed, there is no alternative to using technology. What took months can now take weeks, not only saving time and money, but making in-person interactions much more effective and durable.

**Three goals, one toolkit.**

There are economies of scale—and impact—in tackling problems of culture, leadership, and change using one platform, method, and analytical toolkit. Investments made once can be used repeatedly, and employees accustomed to one experience do not need to re-acclimate to new ways to do things again and again.

**Start with leadership.**

You have to start with strengthening those who lead and manage others. The old saw, “it starts at the top” is true. Start with leadership development, and then use that strengthened population to shape your culture and improve your ability to change. If you start in any other place, you will likely fail.

---

**Do you agree?**

If you agree, we’d love to talk. Visit us online at CorpU.com

Join us as we strive to change the field of leadership development forever.