



Developing the Next Generation of Leaders



By [Diane Law](#)

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The world is changing more quickly than ever before, and technological advancements are happening at a rapid pace. It is hard to even envisage what business will be like 10 years from now. The unpredictability about what the



future holds is more prevalent than ever, and business leaders need the right mindset and capabilities to respond to and navigate the uncertainty around them. Outmoded leadership could cause companies to lag behind competitors, which could ultimately lead to losing market share or worse—becoming obsolete. Staying on the cutting edge of any industry requires flexibility and the ability to adapt quickly to the changes in the marketplace.

But how can we possibly develop leaders for tomorrow's world, when we don't even have a good sense of what that environment will be like? How can learning professionals prepare our current and future leaders to adequately guide our organizations to success?

Using today's leadership development approaches will not be sufficient to grow the skills needed to lead tomorrow. New capability development will require a rethink about learning attitudes and approaches to ensure leaders have embedded the capability to both react to changes and be disruptive innovators.

Leadership capabilities for future success

We can assume that the current leadership competencies, such as having a clear vision, inspiring others, using effective communication, and displaying authenticity will remain as important as they are today. But what are the emerging capabilities that are even more critical for leading in the future? Forbes Magazine published in 2017 "The 16 Essential Leadership Skills." Out of those listed, five stand as ones that will gain in prominence as we enter the next decade.

Ability to learn



The ability to learn quickly, over and above the ability to recall and reformulate current knowledge, will be essential. The willingness to get out of comfort zones and embrace the new is critical to remain knowledgeable and relevant.

Listening

As the pace of work, innovation, and change continues to accelerate, leaders need to be highly skilled listeners to stay ahead of the curve on what's happening with their teams, clients, and partners. That will require learning to listen on multiple levels, including being able to tune in better to the emotional soundtracks of those they lead, serve, and work with.

Empathy

The future of leadership will revolve around capacities to build emotional intelligence. Empathy and being able to intuitively understand other people are cornerstones for bringing people together in mutual understanding around vital, complex, and sometimes alienating sociopolitical and economic issues.

Humility and servant leadership

Leadership is not all about the leader—it's how leaders can enable their teams and their organizations to prepare for the future. Leaders should be modest about their value. Encourage others to shine rather than looking for the light. Being a servant leader can boost engagement, increase trust, and build better team relationships.

Steadiness while remaining adaptable



Leaders need to be confident with not knowing all the answers, comfortable with who they are, able to ask for help. They need to figure out questions, trust more, and question more. And they need to pass on energy, confidence, and trust to their teams.

New development for new leaders

As work itself changes, some of the basic tenets of leadership development should be challenged. We want leadership development to accomplish long-term, embedded results. Many leadership programs have a half-life of a few days or weeks after sessions end. Few have developed adequate transfer mechanisms to bring leadership skills back alive to the office.

When considering leadership development, here are three key aspects that should be incorporated.

Vertical development. Vertical development helps put knowledge into practice. Horizontal development is focused on gaining knowledge, skills, and expertise to meet the demands of a position. Vertical learning, on the other hand, is about the transformation of how someone thinks, feels, and makes sense of the world; it is about increasing the complexity of how one sees and relates to the world. Much of leadership development is based on a horizontal learning approach—the practical tools and techniques such as strategic planning, communication skills, and business acumen. Preparing leaders for the future needs to ensure that developing the attitude of leaders is the core of any program. It isn't about learning techniques; it is about embedding a mindset. When people have a vertical mindset, their purpose and core motivation are about moving forward and creating something new. They jump out of bed every day inspired to create something that is significant and meaningful to them.



Long-term development. Leadership is a journey of discovery, and we must help people manage this journey. Offering a few days or a week of training will not develop a leadership mindset. A leadership development program ideally takes nine months to a year. That gives time for a strong cohort to develop, skills to be practiced and embedded into everyday workplace life, and a leadership mindset to be formed. Any leadership program needs time. The leadership mentality will develop naturally, given the right environment, support, and opportunities. Learning approaches in a classroom and then having longer term, internal projects to implement provides one way to entrench leadership mindsets and behaviors that are practical and insightful and that ideally have a long-term impact on the organization.

Immersive development. Immersive leadership training is similar to what you might see in the Army where people are dropped into an entirely new context and forced to respond in real time against a thinking adversary. Within this approach, incorporating after-action reviews can also help determine what went well and what could have been done differently. The goal here is to take people out of their comfort zones and expose them to unusual situations where they must think differently, behave differently, rely on colleagues, get into different people's shoes, make critical decisions, and deal with difficult, ambiguous situations.

Finding this type of leadership experience that aligns with your particular organizational needs is not a simple task. You must ensure it is something that will truly give the outcomes you desire. An example is the immersive program we used as one part of a leadership training. The goal was to create from scratch a high-quality piece of investigative photojournalism on the state of child malnutrition in rural communities of Greater Accra, Ghana. This ambitious goal—under pressure, against the clock, in a challenging environment—was designed to help develop the leadership mindset of our



emerging leaders by placing participants in a new environment to face a challenge, while being mentored to give their all to complete the task at hand with a team spirit.

Developing future leaders will not get easier. But it can get better. Share your thoughts and experiences in the Comments section below.

Reference

Forbes Coaches Council, "[16 Essential Leadership Skills for the Workplace of Tomorrow](#)," *Forbes*, December 27, 2017.