The Impact Leadership Has on Training and Change

By Simon Lia, BA(hons), MS, Sally Grady, RT, and Larry Peters, PhD

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E X E C U T I V E S U M M A R Y

- In a changing world, not investing in training is handcuffing yourself to the past.
- Most leaders do not focus on the root cause of their problems. Instead, they deal with the symptoms.
- Working on oneself and then leading the training (whatever it is) is the best way to ensure results for you and your team.
- Context trumps content! Leaders need to understand that training by itself is rarely enough.

Many of us have been involved in training and change initiatives that have resulted in little or zero positive change and, in some cases, after huge investments of time, money, and energy, things actually got worse. Why? The premise of this article is not that training is bad. Of course, some programs are better than others, but the curriculum of the training is often trumped by the contextual conditions in which the training is delivered. Who conducts the training, whether it focuses on symptoms or root causes, what is done to prepare for the intervention, and what is done following training to ensure leaders strive for the desirable outcomes are critically important to the process. Addressing these contextual factors is really about leadership.1 This article is about helping leaders expand their understanding, and their role, to enhance the training outcomes they desire.

Compare the following two scenarios (both are real cases) and try to determine what the outcomes may be.

Scenario #1

Within one of the largest hospital systems in the country, there is a radiology department with over 700 employees and over 70 radiologists. After 2 years of committed leadership involvement regarding customer service it was decided to rollout a well-established, world-class, results-oriented training program as detailed in Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High (see Box 1). Memos went out, schedules were created for 7 campuses, and the training began with significant fanfare. A newsletter was created, monthly awards were given out, and the
SVP made a video stating her commitment to a “never-ending journey.” Leaders were asked to become trainers and, although they were very interested, they were simply too busy to be that involved. Many of the leaders showed up for monthly training, but within 6 months most of the senior leaders were too busy to get involved, or made a minimal appearance and left. When the annual “budget crisis” came all training was suspended and employees considered training to merely be a “flavor of the month” business strategy. The following year, blocks of time were set aside for those employees who “wanted” to finish the workshop (it became voluntary) and the initiative was finished within 5 months. There was no follow-up, measurement, or accountability up and down the chain-of-command regarding changes in behavior and/or results.

Scenario #2

The Executive Vice President (EVP) of a large pharmaceutical company conducted candid feedback surveys (written and via personal interview) throughout the entire company. He met on 3 occasions with his senior leadership team to discuss the barriers they were facing and the feedback they were given. Below is an extract of his opening remarks from the first off-site meeting with leaders of all divisions:

“Our internal and external environments have changed significantly over the last three years, and it will no doubt continue to change. We need to change with them. In the past, I’ve talked with you about new management processes... well, not this time. This time, I’m here to talk with you about trust. Trust is always important, but it is especially so in times of change. The most important thing to remember throughout the next 2 days is that we’re on this journey together.

I’m proud of you, this team, and what we have achieved as an organization in 2007. I’m proud of our performance but I know that there are issues that will prevent us from performing at our highest capability in 2008.

I am aware that there are things that I’ve done and there are things that I have not done that I should have that have kept us from being more successful.

I commit to everyone in this room today that I will be working hard to build more trusting relationships and a more trusting organization. I want you to hold me accountable to do the things I say I’ll do and I hope that you’ll be making similar commitments throughout the next 2 days. If we can do that, we can begin to have fun again and that is one of my goals; improve our success while having more fun.”

The following 2 days involved sharing tools from The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything (see Box 2). It included hard conversations about emotionally charged issues (compensation plans, job security, respect, loyalty, etc), even though these issues were not all resolved during that time. There was a level of fear in the room at times about possible repercussions, as participants shared their candid opinions and feelings regarding their relatively new leader. Yet almost everyone was engaged in a dialogue about solutions and the path forward.

Outcomes

Three years later, the radiology department (scenario #1) is still struggling with exactly the same issues it had when they began the service initiative years earlier. And now, when employees and leaders alike hear about a “new” training program, most are so jaded and cynical they actively look for ways to avoid being involved, tacitly sabotage the workshops, or attend but sleep or work on other things. A number of leaders recently commented that they wish they could have remained on the journey they previously began and simply done it the “right” way (as explained later in this article). The “wrong” way, as what transpired in this scenario, was to send their staff through a workshop with an outside consultant, which focused on symptoms, without senior leaders having first experienced the full training.

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Box 1. Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High
By Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler
McGraw-Hill (2002), 256 pages

This groundbreaking book and training program has redefined how people think about getting results. Anywhere you are stuck, not getting what you want, there will be crucial conversations keeping you there. Learn how to handle them well (instead of the usual silence and violence) and you will not only achieve outstanding results, you will also build relationships at the same time. Turn disagreement into sustainable success!

Box 2. The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything
By Stephen M. R. Covey
Free Press (2006), 384 pages

In more and more boardrooms, waiting rooms, and courtrooms people are talking about trust and how it impacts their life, their health, and their results. In this book and training program, you will need to deeply examine who you are at your core and which behaviors (good and bad) you most often employ. How does trust impact your organization, your community, and your family? If, indeed, it is the “one thing” that changes everything, we should all get better at building, restoring, and extending trust to those around us.
The leaders also had no role in the delivery. There was no preparation within the organization to expect the desired changes and, even worse, there was no follow-up to ensure the learning, were recognized, and rewarded.

And what about the pharmaceutical company? Within 30 days they managed to work together to create a compensation plan they could all support and many of these leaders had authentic conversations about issues that were undiscussable for at least a decade or more. What does the future hold for this team and their goal to achieve outstanding results and have some fun in the process? Because the leader of this team was willing to examine his own role first and do enough homework to determine what the root causes may be, he was then able to design an intervention, with the help of experts, that led to immediate and measurable positive changes. Although there will inevitably be challenges, this leader was able to use training to achieve real sustainable outcomes.

Is Training Bad?

No! Training with the right material to the right people in the right way is an absolute necessity. There are lots of reasons for this, yet Marshall Goldsmith, on an individual level, describes it succinctly in his book, What Got You Here Won’t Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful (see Box 3). Training has a long history of helping individuals and companies grow, change, and succeed. This common intervention is a necessary part of helping our people and our companies adapt to a changing world. In a changing world (us, the marketplace, customers, technology, expectations, science, etc), if we do not adapt then we are yesterday’s cutting edge and soon just a distant memory.

There are amazing training programs already available that can address what ails us in almost every situation and context. We should whole-heartedly invest the time, resources, and energy into making their lessons a part of our cultural reality. Yet training alone often misses the mark. Some training practitioners are convinced that very few change initiatives lead to any kind of positive sustainable change that can be attributed to the effect of the training. If that is true, it means rarely do the workshops, change initiatives, or experiential interventions actually in-and-of-themselves have the intended effect.²

This should not be surprising. Sustainable change in people often requires more than “dipping them” into training programs designed to change perspectives, mental models, and skills. Once people leave the training site, they return back to work settings that often conspire against applying what they have learned. Not only is the new learning not rewarded, it oftentimes is punished! These are context issues – the kind that leaders need to address to help ensure that their investment in training has the chance to pay off. This article is about how to help leaders see that they should really focus on and ensuring you make real measurable change with the support of those you interact with most is the heart of this book. Everyone needs a “Marshall Goldsmith” in their lives. Until you can afford him, read the book and apply the concepts as best you can yourself.

The Road to Organizational and Individual Change

Numbers are poor and are trending in a negative direction. Wait times are too long. Patient satisfaction scores are tanking. Employee turnover is higher than normal. Gallup scores are abysmal and no one really knows why. Some machines are overworked, while others, 5 miles down the road, lay fallow. And what’s up with the scheduling system?

If you are like many caring, hard-working leaders, once you identify a critical organizational outcome that is not going well, you would initiate some kind of training or inter-

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Box 3. What Got You Here Won’t Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful

By Marshall Goldsmith and Mark Reiter
Hyperion Books (2007), 256 pages

Do you enjoy where you are? Well, if you want to climb higher (or, in some cases, simply maintain your place) you will have to do something different. Everyone has characteristics that help them and some that hurt them and their ambitions. Determining which ones to focus on and ensuring you make real measurable change with the support of those you interact with most is the heart of this book. Everyone needs a “Marshall Goldsmith” in their lives. Until you can afford him, read the book and apply the concepts as best you can yourself.

There are amazing training programs already available that can address what ails us in almost every situation and context. We should whole-heartedly invest the time, resources, and energy into making their lessons a part of our cultural reality.
vention to fix the problem that is most apparent. Unfortunately, this usually commences the slippery slope to frustration and despair. Leaders can be like magicians when it comes to creating solutions: In the blink of an eye they take action to fix what is broken. Far too often, their solution is a training program! Later, when not much has changed (or perhaps even gets worse) the lack of results is rarely attributed to the leader’s impatience. However, leaders are squarely in the cross hairs of responsibility. They may not have taken the time to diagnose the root causes of the problem, and, as a result, are not focused on the right target. In almost every case of a failed change initiative or training, smart leaders focus on symptoms rather than the root causes.

It is important to understand that the results you are experiencing (good or bad) are the product of your organizational/work design and management system. These results did not create themselves. They are a consequence, a determined outcome of all the ingredients of your organization. Finding it hard to change behavior, seen from this perspective, is like blaming the water, which runs down the natural course of a river. What else can it do? It must run exactly the way it does because of the environment, which it resides in. The same is true with your employees. Today, they are doing exactly what the “design and systems” require and expect of them. If you want to change results, then you need to change what created them, ie, the root causes for the outcomes you care about.

A Journey Begins with One Step

So what would you do first, before jumping in with a training solution? We believe that the first step is always to define, with crystal clarity, the measurable target you are attempting to change. What is the metric that you wish to improve? Then, instead of focusing on addressing symptoms, take one more critical step: try to determine all of the factors that are impacting it. Once you begin thinking differently about the challenge at hand you will see the problem differently. You will probably see that there are many things affecting what you are trying to change, most of which can be grouped into 3 categories.

First are the individual people involved and, specifically, you will need to investigate their will and their skill. What are they motivated to do and not motivated to do? What, relative to the issue you’re trying to address, skills do they have and which are they lacking? Second, you will need to think about how the social system impacts the issue you want to address. These people (peers, bosses, customers, family, competitors, etc) impact your peoples’ desire and drive, as well as their ability to behave in ways that move your desired needle. Finally, you will need to examine how “things” impact the people you rely on to get the results you want. Do rules, procedures, technology, locations, schedules, bonuses, consequences, bureaucracies, etc, support and help your desired outcomes or do they contribute to the problem?

If you want to organize and redirect the forces that matter most, you don’t need to be a psychologist, sociologist, or anthropologist. You will need to determine what the people around you want to do (and not do) and what they are able to do (and not able to do). You will need to examine the social system and discover how to use the support and help that people have at their disposal. And you will need to align the non-human elements in your world so that they encourage and enable your team to act in ways that lead to your desired results. To dive deeper into this topic before beginning the journey for change, see Box 4.

The Role of Leaders

Imagine you have discovered many of the latent barriers that are holding your people captive in unproductive behaviors and replaced these with positive forces that encourage the right behaviors. You have also encouraged key people (eg, managers and informal leaders) to provide the social support needed to motivate and enable people to contribute to

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**Box 4. Influencer: The Power to Change Anything**


Not many books and change initiatives have swept the nation like this one. If you are committed to making real change, then discovering 6 sources of influence for every person or organization in every situation is essential. You do what you do because the world around you and inside you drives you to do it. Change the world around you and it makes sense you will change what you do. The concepts in this book and training program, if applied well, are guaranteed to change your world.
important goals. Finally, you have aligned key drivers in your organizational/work design and management systems to support the desired behavior. Is it now time to celebrate success? No. Now is actually the time to do what most will find the hardest. Leaders need to behave differently. Not perfectly, but consistently different. To do otherwise will lead to certain failure – as the cliché goes, it is insane to keep on doing the same thing and expect new results!

Real time. Face-to-face. Day-in, day-out. You have the biggest influence on what happens within your team, your department, perhaps the entire facility. Instead of trying to “fix” other people, you need to first address your own contribution to the troubling results you are trying to fix.

Are you who Leo Tolstoy had in mind when he said, “Everyone thinks of changing humanity. Nobody thinks of changing themselves?” This is where the rubber meets the road. What will you do differently to achieve the results you really want? This is simply about confronting reality: What have you been saying and doing that has led to the mess you are in? Or, what have not been saying and not doing that has conspired to create a breeding ground for mediocrity?

- Do you shut people down in meetings when others disagree with you?
- Do you praise people often in a meaningful way?
- Do you apologize when you make mistakes… little bloopers and the big kahunas alike?
- Do you show respect to all people regardless of their viewpoints, decisions, or position?
- Do you fight to get your way or the best way?
- Do you invite others to give you feedback and do you make it safe for them to do so?
- Do you take the credit for other people’s ideas or contributions?
- Do you continue to grow or are you a dinosaur?
- And one of the biggest of all: Do you speak up candidly and respectfully when others, especially your supervisors, behave in ways they have agreed not to, that are inappropriate, or are simply wrong?

No one is perfect. Everyone has aspects to their behavioral repertoire that, when employed, holds them back from what it is they say they want. Some may struggle to accurately identify what these undesirable parts are and many will procrastinate, waiver, or simply refuse to do anything about it. If that is you, change does not begin until you are ready to do something about it. Once you have mastered how to get the feedback you need (whether it be on apologizing, publicly making the case for your intended change, listening, saying “thank you,” following-up, or feeding forward), not only will you make significant changes, but, importantly, the people around you will start believing that this time you mean what you say. Then they may take the risk and be willing to work on making changes for themselves.

The Path Forward

Leadership teams that see the need for change, can articulate the change, and understand the consequences of not changing, are often not willing to change themselves first. They ask others to take care of it. They hire consultants to design it. They pay trainers to deliver it. They sometimes examine the data gathered by others.

Leadership teams should not roll out training unless and until the issues keeping them stuck are dealt with and resolved within the team itself. How can you reasonably expect your people to behave in healthy, courageous, appropriate ways when you do not? You should be immersed in the principles, concepts, and most importantly the skills and behaviors before you ask or require those that report to you to attend and engage. You need not be perfect. You do need to authentically set the standard and create the path forward for everyone else.

Conclusion

We began this article suggesting that training alone is not
the answer to addressing critical issues that companies face. It is however, part of the solution, but a much bigger part is the leadership required to make training contribute to sustainable change. Leaders lead by first recognizing that their goal is new results through behavior change and that training is but one aspect of what might be necessary to produce that change. They understand that they need to identify root causes and critical behaviors to deliver the new outcomes they want. They learn the importance of searching for the individual, social and structural forces that contribute to why change does not occur and then act to reduce the impact of those factors. Most importantly, they lead by taking risks to become what is expected of others, and when they do that, they start to create the conditions necessary for real, sustainable change to occur. Taken together, these actions will create powerful forces for change. In this context, all training will be an integral part of the behavior change puzzle – it will serve change because it is part of the consistent strategy that makes change inevitable.  

References


Simon M. Lia lives near Orlando, Florida and runs a results-focused consulting firm called GEMS Consulting. He specializes in high-stakes leadership coaching and training, where underlying root cause issues and contextual issues need to be addressed. He has worked with many of the world’s most successful organizations and in radiology departments, training and coaching, for over 20 years. For more information about any of the principles or concepts in this article, please contact Simon at sia@gemsconsultinginc.com.

Sally Grady is the director of imaging at Florida Hospital overseeing the award winning Celebration Health campus and the Kissimmee Campus. She is also the creator of Max and Buddy, the animatronic and DVD characters that help children and adults overcome their fears in the radiology department and understand what is about to happen to them. She can be reached at Sally.Grady@flhosp.org.

Dr. Larry Peters is professor of management at the Neeley School of Business at Texas Christian University. He has published extensively in top-tier journals and is considered an expert in the areas of leadership and change. His recent consulting work has focused on organizational context in leadership development and helping leaders develop the face-to-face skills that allow them to produce new and better results. Dr. Peters can be reached at L.Peters@tcu.edu.
Questions

Instructions: Choose the answer that is most correct.

1. The basis of this article is about making a cultural change at the leadership level to:
   a. Support the department’s promotion strategies
   b. Enhance training initiatives and outcomes
   c. Solve problems associated with low productivity
   d. None of the above

2. What book recommended by the authors of this article identifies a well established, results oriented training program?
   b. “What Got You Here Won’t Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful”
   c. “The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything”
   d. None of the above

3. According to the authors, which of the following would be the wrong way to institute training in your department?
   a. Have senior leaders first experience the full training
   b. Send staff through a workshop with an outside consultant
   c. Make certain that follow-up ensures that the training is reinforced
   d. None of the above

   a. Simon Lia
   b. Sally Grady
   c. Larry Peters
   d. Marshall Goldsmith

5. Which of the following is a true statement, according to the authors of this article?
   a. There are amazing training programs available that can address what ails us in almost every situation and context
   b. Current training programs deal only with productivity
   c. Any training program will make a big difference in our department
   d. None of the above

6. Research indicates that one out of every thousand training programs, in-and-of-themselves appear to have:
   a. Consistent results
   b. Reliable results
   c. The intended effect
   d. None of the above

AHRA Home-Study Resources

The Impact Leadership Has on Training and Change

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Carefully read the following multiple choice questions. Mark your answers on the answer sheet found on page 26 and mail or fax the answer sheet to:

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7. In almost every case of a failed change initiative or training, smart leaders focus on symptoms rather than the root causes.
   a. True
   b. False

8. It is important to understand that results of training, whether good or bad, are the product of the work design and:
   a. Leadership skills
   b. Management system
   c. Team spirit
   d. Environment

9. If you want to change the results, you need to change:
   a. Departments
   b. Hospitals
   c. What created them
   d. Who suggested them

10. What is the first step a leader should take before jumping in with a training solution?
    a. Define the measurable target you are attempting to change
    b. Consult with other training experts
    c. Use the same training program you used before
    d. None of the above

11. Instead of focusing on addressing the symptoms of the problem, another critical step would be to determine:
    a. All of the factors that are impacting the problem
    b. Who is causing the problem
    c. Where the problem is located
    d. None of the above

12. Before starting a training program, the leader should ask the following question(s):
    a. What are the individuals involved motivated to do?
    b. What skills do the individuals involved have?
    c. What skills are individuals involved lacking?
    d. All of the above

13. What is the most important role of the leader in establishing change?
    a. To behave perfectly
    b. To behave consistently different
    c. To continue to behave the same way
    d. None of the above

14. Who has the biggest influence on what happens within the team, the department, and perhaps the entire facility?
    a. The leader
    b. The consultant
    c. The employee
    d. None of the above

15. Which of the following are questions the leader should ask himself/herself when trying to effect change?
    a. Do I praise people often in a meaningful way?
    b. Do I take credit for other people’s ideas?
    c. Do I apologize when I make mistakes?
    d. All of the above

16. Which of the following is a way the leader can get feedback from team members to establish change?
    a. Publicly making the case for the intended change
    b. Listening to team members
    c. Following-up with team members
    d. All of the above

17. Leadership teams should not roll out training unless and until the issues keeping them stuck are dealt with and resolved within the team itself.
    a. True
    b. False

18. First and foremost, the leader should:
    a. Clarify what outcome or result is to be changed
    b. Determine which behaviors need to be the target of the change effort
    c. Work on his/her own behavior and that of the leadership team first
    d. All of the above

19. Which of the following is the best solution regarding training?
    a. Hire someone to do your training for you
    b. Lead the training yourself
    c. Have someone else in the hospital lead the training
    d. None of the above

20. Which of the following books encourages leaders to deeply examine who they are at their core and which behaviors they most often employ?
    a. “The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything”
    b. “Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High”
    c. “What Got You Here Won’t Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful”
    d. “Influencer: The Power To Change Anything”
**Answer Sheet**

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The Impact Leadership Has on Training and Change

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