

The Top 7 – Cost Free – Ways to Build Leadership Skills in Your Employees

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Developing your organization's future leaders is one of those things that most SMB CEOs and COOs figure they'll get "around to" someday. The two biggest obstacles are the perceived cost (with no easily identifiable ROI) and the sheer effort it would take to devise a plan of development.

Lucky for you, I am going to solve both those obstacles in one article!

When a task seems insurmountable most of us push it to the back of our minds or the bottom of our to-do list. But developing a leadership pipeline in the A/E/C industry has reached a crisis level and you must act on it for the future survival of your organization.

To get you started, here are seven cost-free ways that you can begin developing leadership knowledge and competencies in your future leaders (in no particular order).

JOB ROTATIONS

In Fortune 500 companies, job rotations are used to cycle up-and-coming leaders through various functions and to have them work with a variety of mentors so that they understand how the business as a whole works before they get slotted into a leadership role.

A job visitation, however, can be a one- or two-day tag along with someone in the organization. For instance, a project manager could spend a day or two with the business development manager understanding how projects are targeted and nurtured. Alternatively, an accounts payable



manager could spend one day a month on-site with a project manager to see how the business works on the ground.

READING ASSIGNMENTS/GROUPS

A common complaint I hear from A/E/C owners is the fact that their up-and-coming leaders don't understand enough about the industry. Sending out a weekly article from the Home Office to first line leaders, pointing out the critical ideas in the article and asking a few questions to stimulate thought, enables your future leaders to start thinking more broadly about the industry vs. your corner of the market.

You might also have a monthly reading group meeting in which the articles are discussed. Hearing other's thoughts and perceptions goes a long way in helping individuals to think more clearly and more broadly about their own understanding

of what they've read.

VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering is a marvelous way to gain valuable skills that you couldn't offer at your company. By volunteering on the events committee, for instance, they will have a better grasp of planning, scheduling, communication, etc.

Any type of volunteering is good, however volunteering for an industry association chapter is even better for immersing future leaders in the industry. They will get to meet and learn from professionals from other organizations and be able to see possibilities for their own career.

MENTORING

Mentor relationships are used in executive development all the time, but there's no reason they have to be limited to the senior level of the organization. The idea in a mentoring relationship is to impart experience and lessons-learned to help the up-and-coming leader to understand the business in a broader perspective.

Successful mentor relationships require a paternalistic mindset in which the more senior person believes it is their responsibility to lookout for and advise the more junior person. It is a 180 from a "traditional" hierarchical relationship and is often best achieved when the mentor is not in the direct line of command with the mentee.

Mentor relationships can also be developed outside the organization, and often these relationships begin due to involvement in professional association chapters.

JOURNALING

Journaling is a private activity that only takes a few minutes each day. The idea behind journaling is to reflect on the "big ideas" that have happened that day. What did you achieve? What questions do you have? What are you struggling with? Who do you admire and why? Management guru Peter Drucker credited his decades-long journaling with his ability to develop management theories that organizations still rely on today.

During 1:1 meetings with one's manager, an up-and-coming leader can review their journal to reference their accomplishments and ask any questions they are struggling with. If the journal isn't used in a conversation with one's

manager, is it still a useful exercise in marking one's progress as a professional.

PEER GROUPS

Peer groups are becoming the "new training." Peer groups are weekly or bi-weekly meetings of co-workers in the same role or at the same level of the organization who help one another to do their jobs better. While someone should be in charge of facilitating the meeting so that it stays on task; the agenda is very open and intended to address the most pressing issues of the attendees.


We find, in the groups that we facilitate, that the conversations are pretty evenly split between interpersonal concerns, such as how to deal with an underperforming direct report, and occupational issues such as how to keep a technical glitch from derailing a project (aka asking for help with work-arounds).

LUNCH AND LEARNS

A few years ago, we worked with a client that had a lot of well-hidden technical expertise. There were experts in the company and in the field that no one knew about. The tragedy of this situation is that when technical issues came up in the field, nobody knew who to call for assistance – everyone felt that the responsibility was theirs alone to "figure out."

This organization instituted a monthly lunch and learn in which each expert was asked to discuss what they knew, tell some stories to illustrate how their expertise worked in the field, and answer questions. The point of the conversation was not to make those in attendance into experts themselves but to open a line of communication between project managers and others in the organization who could help them.

One unforeseen benefit of this knowledge sharing was an uptick in business development. When PMs or superintendents faced an unusual request or issue they stopped treating it as an anomaly and instead viewed it as an opportunity the company could handle.

It's my recommendation that you pick no more than two of these options for the coming year – and apply them consistently. In a year, I guarantee that you will be satisfied with the level of "upskilling" that has occurred internally. At that point you can choose to add another developmental approach to the mix. 



About the Author

Dr. Nanette Miner is a leadership development and workplace-learning strategy consultant. Through her firm, [The Training Doctor](#), she has revolutionized the way that individuals are prepared for leadership roles in their organizations. Rather than a chosen few, her process is aimed at ensuring everyone in the company has the skills and business acumen of a leader. This approach ensures both immediate and long-term return-on-investment (ROI) for an organization.

She has written articles for *Chief Learning Office magazine*, *Forbes*, and *MBA World* and is a frequent guest on workplace training and career podcasts and talk radio such as *Inc. Radio* and *America's Workforce Radio*.

Nanette regularly speaks at industry conferences and corporate learning events on how to integrate leadership capabilities throughout an organization. An author of eight books, her most recent is *Future-Proofing Your Organization*.

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