

## Budget Friendly Leadership Development

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The other day I heard an industry expert say, “If you’re not spending as much on professional development as you are on business development, you’re going to find yourself out of business.” WOW.

The other side of that coin is the business owner who says, “I don’t have the time (or the money) to uplevel people’s professional skills” (professional skills are people skills and/or understanding the business or the industry).

If you’re scared by the first comment and hobbled by the second – here are some “easy” and affordable ways for you to develop your future leaders’ professional skills, this year.

### External Options

#### Professional Association Programs

ALWAYS look to your professional association first. The #1 mission of all professional associations is member education. And with over 25,000 members, you can bet that [CMAA is offering tools](#) that will benefit everyone, at every stage of their career.

Look under the [Education and Training](#) tab at the top of the homepage. In addition to a variety of live and virtual courses, the association offers live and on-demand webinars, an eLearning Leadership Library, and the [Construction Leaders Podcast](#). There is even a highly competitive [Emerging Leaders Program](#).

There are countless affordable, timely, and industry specific



ways to develop your future leaders simply by taking advantage of your CMAA membership.

#### Executive Education

College-affiliated business schools offer executive education programs. These programs typically range from a few days to several weeks, covering business-strategy concepts, financial management, and organizational behavior. While they can be expensive, they provide high-caliber instruction and cross-industry perspectives which are particularly valuable in developing a more expansive business perspective than a program that is geared specifically to the construction industry. If you live near a university or community or technical college, see what they have to offer under the heading of “executive education.” (Google, for example, site: gsu.edu “executive

education” and it will bring you right to that page on their site.)

### **Consultants**

If you’re looking to address a specific challenge or topic such as communication skills or financial acumen, a local consultant can be a good option. Check the Association for Talent Development’s website (TD.org) for a chapter near you; then look at the chapter’s specific web page to find consultants and their specialties in your area. The nice part of working with a consultant is that you can ask them to tailor the topic to your group or a specific situation. For instance, you might want to uplevel people’s communication skills, and the consultant would typically offer verbal and nonverbal communication, active listening, and the like. But if you specifically want them to include conflict management as you see it’s a growing problem in your company, just ask. They will be happy to tailor their “usual” curriculum to your needs. A local consultant is a cost-effective solution because you won’t have to pay travel expenses.

### **Internal Training Options**

There are many leadership development activities you can conduct internally, and essentially cost-free, with just a little intentionality.

### **Mentorship Programs**

Mentorship initiatives pair experienced leaders with up-and-coming leaders. This is particularly effective in construction, where every project is fluid, because leadership lessons can be “taught” in real-time. For example, a younger project manager (PM) may be having a tough time with a demanding client. Rather than having a more senior person step in and resolve the situation, that senior person could instead coach the younger PM in ways to phrase push-back or suggest options the company is willing to “give” in on, to keep a client happy.

Successful mentoring programs include regular meetings, specific learning expectations, and a way to keep track of progress. The mentor and mentee do not have to be in the same field or role. For instance, your business development manager could mentor a project manager; he/she does not have to be a senior PM. Remember, we’re developing leadership skills, not technical acumen. (You might have a different relationship to develop more advanced technical skills. At a

former client of mine, new employees had their “boss” and a “technical coach.”)


### **Project-Based Learning**

Construction firms can leverage ongoing projects as leadership laboratories. Assigning rising leaders to progressively challenging project roles, supported by senior supervision, provides real-world experience. Some responsibilities might be client interactions, internal team or trades management, and decision-making duties. As with mentoring, remember to keep track of what the “learner” has accomplished, perhaps by asking them to keep a journal.

### **Reading and Discussion**

One of my favorite leadership building approaches is to “assign” reading and follow the reading up with discussions lead by a senior leader. If you regularly read business or industry publications, start forwarding an article or two per month to your up-and-coming leaders and then convene a meeting – in person or virtual – to discuss what they learned or what questions they have. Be prepared with questions yourself, such as “Do you think we could do something similar here?,” “How do you think they missed X?,” or “Do you think our customers would embrace or reject this if we did something similar?”

Another great option is to go to the [Impact Library](#) on the CMAA site and choose case studies to read and discuss. While these are technically oriented, you can focus your conversation on leadership decisions, such as “Why do you think they chose to do X that way?” or share a similar project/story and the lessons you learned.

The most effective leadership development programs combine knowledge with practical application, industry-specific challenges with universal leadership principles, and immediate skill-building with long-term development goals. By combining external and internal training options, you can develop your future leaders on your schedule and within your budget. 



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## About the Author

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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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