Develop Talent with Action Learning

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DEVELOPING TALENT IN TODAY'S WORKPLACE must go beyond a PowerPoint presentation. Studies show people learn by doing rather than listening to a lecture. To produce top-quality results, development programs must be innovative, interactive, and customizable. Action learning, for example, is designed to solve an organization's specific business issue (e.g., introducing a new product/service, moving into a new market, acquiring a company) or talent issue (e.g., improving diversity and inclusion, reducing attrition, solving for burnout), while also developing talent by helping leaders and teams build important business skills.

Prior to beginning an action learning program, an organization typically conducts assessments to identify its developmental areas. Designing an effective program involves identifying an issue within the organization participants can solve. When selecting the business or talent issue, keep these key filters in mind:

- **Choose a broad problem for high-level leaders:** Action learning participants often are more senior-level leaders (e.g., vice presidents and directors), so it is important that the issue is of the magnitude they would address at their current or next promoted level.

- **Lean toward impact and passion:** Select an issue that will have an impact on the organization, one participants can be passionate about and gain visibility through, and one on which they are willing to spend time and effort to recommend innovative solutions.

- **Sponsors will be highly influential:** The team of senior executives sponsoring the action learning program likely will have a personal stake in a certain issue and will help select it.

- **The problem should have multiple solutions:** It is ideal to work on an issue that can result in multiple, varied solutions to pitch to the sponsors. If it's broad enough, it can be reused for an additional cohort.

Once the issue and teams are determined, the action learning can begin. The combination of interactive one-on-one training, group exercises, coaching, and formal skills training will push participants out of their comfort zones, resulting in participant engagement as they build leadership skills, improve leadership behavior, and help create a business solution that will have a positive impact on the organization.

Productivity Coach's Corner

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3 Questions to Build Trust

People work better with people they trust. There are three questions you can ask to increase the likelihood people will trust you. Use the third question carefully and sparingly as it can be a sensitive issue.

1. **What do you need?** Make sure you learn about their needs and understand their perspective. Build rapport by listening to them tell you what *they* need from you.
2. **What else do I notice?** Watch what happens when you recognize people for making a contribution or doing great work. Catch people doing something right and acknowledge them by sharing a specific way their work is helping the team, the organization, or the cause.
3. **What are you worried about?** This is not a question you ask as much as one you intuit. If you listen and watch and feel how the conversation is going, you may be able to identify something right below the surface. You may or may not be able to ask or address it in the conversation in real time. But if possible, do something after the meeting that lets them know they don't have to worry about that particular issue you noted.

Effective leaders notice when people need support, need to be noticed, or are challenged by what's in front of them. It's your job as their trusted leader to make it easier for people to do their best work.