

DEVELOPING LEADERS FOR REAL

*Proven approaches that
deliver impact*



Edited by

**HARRY GRAY
ANNE GIMSON
IAN CUNNINGHAM**

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Developing Leaders for Real – ENDORSEMENTS

“Over the last few years, it has become increasingly clear to most providers, prescribers and consumers of leadership development programs that too often, the impact of these programs is much less significant and durable than the world rightfully expects from them. This stimulating book examines the causes of this situation and proposes a number of excellent and diverse principles and practices that will help improve it. It is an essential read for anyone – academic or practitioner – interested in making leadership development the game changer that the world needs it to be if we are to tackle the world’s problems more effectively.”

Jean-François Manzoni, Professor of Leadership and Organizational Development and President, IMD

“As someone who has worked both in commercial and in development, I have spent most of my career looking at performance and seeking the best ways in which to help others, particularly leaders, realize their full potential. I am delighted to finally find a book that brings to life a collection of thought provoking, ‘real world’ examples of Leadership Development. I was struck by the timeless nature of the underpinning principles and excited by the evidenced and proven practical examples shared, finding myself going back to chapters particularly relevant to me currently. I would highly recommend ‘Developing Leaders for Real’ for any professional involved in Leadership Development who has a curious mind and believes there must be better ways in which we can help leaders be their best self. You’ll find your answers here!”

Richard Brooke, Talent Director, AMEA/APAC, Bacardi

“Ever noticed how your leaders often don’t seem to apply formal learning? Why? Because, ultimately, the learning journey is deeply personal and fraught with complexity. There are thousands of books that purport to tell you how get it right. I finally found one that delivers on the promise: its evidenced, globally relevant, written by people who walk the talk and topped off with a how-to guide. What more can a learning professional ask for?!”

Tania Hector, Global Head of Learning, Nestlé

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

From Harry: To Keek who sustained me throughout the writing of this book.

From Anne: To my husband, Andrew and my daughter, Natasha, with love and gratitude.

From Ian: To Jane, David and Lucy – for being there.

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FOREWORD

I once worked with a distinguished leader of a large organisation. Whenever things went awry (unfortunately, quite often) he tended, like so many leaders, to blame his direct reports. According to him, it was always their fault. Not surprisingly, they had a different version of events. Among other things, they complained that he was moody, indecisive and failed to take them into his confidence.



I, an impartial outsider with no axe to grind, was invited to help the leader work out what he could do to improve relationships. For an agreed period, I met with the leader bi-weekly for a two-hour session. We always started with a review of what had happened since we last met. He would look in his diary and describe various happenings, some that had gone well and, inevitably, some that had not gone well. With the latter, he always insisted that it was because other people had let him down. I would invite him to reflect on whether he could have handled the situation differently, but, despite my best efforts, I always drew a blank. He could not or would not accept that his behaviour might have been a contributory factor. He remained adamant that other people needed to change, not him.

Sadly, in my experience this sort of intransigence is not unusual in senior people. The notion that they, not just the people who work with them, could benefit from some learning and development too often falls on deaf ears. This is why developing leaders is such an intriguing challenge: a challenge greatly eased by the ideas offered in this book.

Leaders (though few will admit it) are lonely people with few, if any, confidants they can trust. They wrestle with a constant stream of uncertainties: how to let go and yet stay in touch, how to know what's really going on in their organisation, how to decide between conflicting priorities, how and what to delegate, how to motivate people, how to stay focussed on long-term strategies when current problems are pressing, how to stay positive on

off-days, how to admit they were wrong/have had a change of mind ... the list is endless. Perhaps the biggest problem is an underlying fear of losing control, especially as every organisation has a built-in propensity to fail and being in control is illusionary! It reminds me of the lonely navy commander who would use the ship's tannoy system to announce from the bridge:

Now hear this,

Now hear this.

This is your captain speaking,

This is your captain speaking.

That is all,

That is all.

Little wonder that leaders either crave certainty, longing to be told The Answer or convince themselves they have seen the light and write boastful books full of homespun hubris.

So, being a leader is fraught with uncertainty and the only lifeline is, I believe, to become an effective learner, using everyday experiences as the raw material. However, most leaders are puzzled by people like me who extol the virtues of experiential learning and even go so far as to recommend that they should be role models for continuous development and create work places where learning is built into the way things are done, actively encouraged and supported. Mistakenly, most leaders believe that learning is something that only happens in formal classrooms or lecture halls or on didactic courses. The idea that everything that happens, nice or nasty, planned or unplanned, provides an endless stream of learning opportunities, waiting to be reflected upon and converted into useful insights and improved actions, is somehow viewed as not 'proper' learning. Or perhaps, deep down, leaders are worried that they might be caught learning, with the implication that they, like all ordinary mortals, are 'work in progress': developing leaders.

This book has some wise and welcome recurring themes. Here are just four:

- Leading is multifaceted and complex.
- Effective leadership is situational, rendering simplistic 'one size fits all' formulas totally inadequate.

- Experiential learning (i.e. ‘real’ learning) is the key to continuous development.
- The most appropriate learning for leaders is self-led, and preferably supported with help from a dispassionate listener.

I have lost count of the number of times I have been approached by organisations inviting me to design a course that would meet a perceived need, usually in my case to improve teamwork or the effectiveness of management meetings. I quickly learnt that there were two big snags with these invitations. Firstly, since I had not been involved in any diagnosis, I was expected to proceed on the assumption it was sound and true. Secondly, in effect I was being invited to collude with the conclusion that a course was the answer. I therefore used to rebel and insist on having direct access so that I could observe the team meetings first hand. Once access was gained, I was not only free to carry out my own diagnosis but, even more importantly, I could kick start the learning process by providing feedback, asking questions and encouraging reflection. Having inveigled my way in, I gambled that the participants would value the process and forget all about the initial request for a course! It mostly worked but what a shame to have to resort to subterfuge to make the point.

None of the contributors to this book would pander to requests for ready-made answers. Instead, in an accessible and evidenced way, they share their carefully considered views about the subtleties and complexities of helping leaders to develop. Since, like it or not, leaders shape organisational cultures and too many of them are toxic, what could be more important?

Dr Peter Honey

October 2021

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