

## Developing Leadership Skills among Professional Students: An Experiential Training beyond the classroom.

*Leadership is ultimately about creating a way for people to contribute to making something extraordinary happen*  
- Alan Keith, Genentech

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### ABSTRACT

Developing Leadership qualities in professional students and career builders positions a great challenge to modern educational institutions and corporate world as well. There are several possible methods like Action Learning, (term which was defined by Revans in the early 1940's) to enhance leadership qualities in professional students and employees among which Experiential Training has become popular and the best implemented training technique where participants directly involve in the training process. This training helps to transform the theoretical knowledge into a skill that motivates the participants to engross in practical application in a wide variety of activities & situations, tends to provide a stress free environment from conventional classroom learning set up, and focuses on interpersonal skills, which is playing a vital role in the corporate world.

Unfortunately, the significance of these training programs is often undervalued and questioned by many of the conventional teachers, professors and educational bodies. Do the skills acquired in ET actually transform to the work setting, or do they simply work only in the outdoors? Experiential training beyond the class room answers this question. This Paper presents practical experiments of Experiential Training methodologies, experiences and outcomes of the training and a few more innovative training methodologies in order to develop leadership qualities.

**Key words:** Professional learning, Experimental learning, Skills and annexure.

### I INTRODUCTION

Leadership is one of the central and most important elements of successful management teams or organizations. The difference that good leadership makes to an organization - often reflects starkly not only in company performance but also in team's morale. One of the biggest challenges

leaders face is answering the question - What do we do to deliver value?. In ET training method participants will be able to answer themselves to this type of critical questions.

Leaders may or may not be experts but they know how to work with experts to achieve their vision. They acknowledge their lack of expertise with all humility.

Just like many other topics of self-development, Leadership is also one of the most difficult ones to comprehend and reduce it to cookbook size approach for implementation. During my training experience of designing and conducting soft skills programs for several professional college students and going through few of the internationally bestselling books on Leadership, my mind was swarming with a lot of questions; one of them was, "Are leaders born or developed?" And indeed, I am one of those firm believers of the theory "Leaders are developed". To me, "Leadership is not a position but a state of a being". With my little corporate experience and Training synopsis, it has been noticed that many successful leaders are not from the B-schools of repute; but they have developed themselves into leaders over their lifetime; they have learned, observed, changed their attitude, brought about desired behavioral skills and transformed themselves into potential leaders.

During one of my training programs, a participant asked a very simple question, "What do I do differently, when I go back to my usual life after that particular leadership training program, (from Monday morning onwards)?" It was a fair question from an inquisitive participant who wanted the formula for becoming a leader. This article is an attempt to simplify how leadership skills can be developed through experiential learning based.

## II REVIEW

### What is experiential learning?

Learning is not a simple process of knowledge transmission from teacher to

students. Nor do students achieve academic mastery by acquiring a particular body of knowledge they recall and reproduce at the time of exam on demand of pass or fail purpose and even securing certain percentage.

Experiential learning is highly effective because it provides a multidimensional encounter with knowledge supported by relationships with others and the real world that occurs in specific, ongoing intellectual interactions, participation in activities and discoveries and so on. It (ET) is an engaged learning that bends theory into course work and applies it to the real and practical world.



Experiential Learning is recognized as one of the most important objectives and challenges for higher education. As college students face a rapidly changing and increasingly connected world where applying knowledge-to-practice becomes not just a benefit or personal need, but a professional necessity.

As a result, experiential learning supports student growth as a confident, lifelong learner capable of adapting one's intellectual abilities, contributing in a wide variety of situations, and applying one's academic studies to making a positive difference in the world. Developing student capacity for integrative learning through experiential learning opportunities is central to personal success, social responsibility, and civic engagement in today's global society.

Backed by 30 years of original research and data from millions of leaders around the world, The Leadership Challenge model - put

together by Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner - offers a set of leadership practices based on the real-world experiences of thousands of people in leadership roles.

What it reveals is that leadership is not the private reserve of a few charismatic men and women. It is a process ordinary people use when they are bringing forth the best in them and others. What it has also shown dramatically over the years is that people make extraordinary things happen by liberating the leader within everyone.

The promise that The Leadership Challenge holds forth and the lessons it teaches is that: Leaders do exhibit certain distinct practices when they are doing their best. This process varies from industry to industry, profession to profession, community to community, country to country. Good leadership is an understandable and a universal phenomenon. Though each leader is a unique individual, there are patterns to the practice of leadership that are shared. And that can be learnt.

The key learning from the Leadership Challenge is that when getting extraordinary things done in organizations, leaders engage in these Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership:

Model the Way.

- Inspire by Sharing Mission and Vision
- Embrace the Challenges attitude
- Leading by an example called walk the talk
- Touching the hearts

The theory is that leadership skills can be honed and team spirit imbibed by taking the students into the outdoors and making them observe the nature by conducting different activities and tasks in its lap.

ET training typically involves facilitators



leading the participants through activities, encouraging them to

reflect on experiences and helping them to transfer the knowledge, skills learned and experience to a working context. It focuses on enhancing self-awareness, changing attitudes, building teams and improving inter-personal skills.

Among the advantages attributed to experiential learning, as opposed to passive observational learning, are: the participant has a concrete experience and it is an experience which is observed and reflected on. Professional students /Employees are more likely to learn from training programs that provide an opportunity to get good skills.

A distinctive feature of ET is that activities are almost assured to pose unique challenges, because they are so unrelated to participants' job responsibilities but skills developed through the participation of all the organized activities are the dire need of the this slowing economic growth that enterprises need to look internally to maximize employee's contributions to revenue, productivity and base margins. This can be particularly conducive for creative thoughts.

Other common objectives attributed to ET programs include increasing participants' awareness of team members' strengths and

improving conflict management. But to what extent does all this translate into results?

Through my training experience, it's been noticed that four levels of training outcomes are sought i.e. **Reactions, Learning, Behaviors and Results.**

The fourth level (Results) considers the impact of the training on the participant leading quality, interpersonal skill, team forming, executive ability, cohesiveness, etc.

### **III TRAINING SNAPSHOT / EXECUTION**

**"Leadership is not a position but a state of a being"**

**From conventional class room learning to Virtual Experienced- based learning:**

Experiential learning is an understanding and disposition that a student builds across the curriculum, from making simple connections among ideas and experiences to synthesizing and transferring learning to new, complex situations.

**How does experiential learning happen beyond the classroom?**

Experiential learning happens beyond the classroom when students participate and experience in different activities and use intellectual talents requiring adaptability, sophisticated knowledge, problem-solving abilities, and commitment to life-long learning in an authentic experience in the lap of nature that contributes in making a positive difference in a real life situation.

#### **Model Activities:**

There may be innumerable activities that can be conducted to develop leadership qualities



among the participants. Here I would like to present an activity as an example.

**Activity Name:** **Rope treading**

**Supplies needed:** Rope and a piece of wooden cardboard

**Number of participants:** Eight or Ten

**Instructions:** Participants have to walk with equal pace lifting their each foot with the help of a rope tied the bottom of a wooden cardboard simultaneously and move forward.

#### **LEARNING INSIGHTS**

- ✓ **They learn to focus on executing the task.**
- ✓ **They get to experience how to manage the talent efficiently.**
- ✓ **They develop 'we' rather than 'I' attitude in a team work.**
- ✓ **They get to learn how to face challenges and achieve the task.**
- ✓ **Cohesiveness gets developed through activities.**
- ✓ **They imbibe leading quality by guiding one another in the processes of reaching their destination.**
- ✓ **They also develop proactive nature.**
- ✓ **Even they develop Lateral thinking (called thinking 'Out of Box').**

### I. How does ET craft a vision among the every participant in a team?

In a 1996 HBR article, James Collins and Jerry Porras showed that companies with a strong sense of vision had outperformed the others in the stock market by a factor of 12 since 1925!

Vision reflects what we care most about and is derived from our sense of purpose and values. It provides meaning, attracts commitment, and focuses human energy by drawing on our deepest yearnings in striving towards a purposeful goal.

As someone said: *"A task without a vision is slog, while a task with a vision is the hope of the world"*.

Vision provides a clear, easily understood picture of a better future. Strong visions inspire every one. They embody our values, provide us with purpose, and direct us to what will be different and distinctive.

*Kennedys vision "To put a man on the moon by the end of the decade", inspired a whole nation.*

At ET, participants are particularly excited when they plan and execute a particular task /activity /game.

#### The outcomes that this ET methodology seeks to achieve with the participants are:

- Identify their leadership strengths and weaknesses.
- Ability to verbalize their views in an intended manner.
- Recognize and realize their leading qualities.

- Inspire others to share a common vision
- Search for opportunities to change and improve.
- Experiment with innovative ideas and learn from accompanying mistakes.
- Build collaboration, teamwork and trust.
- Strengthen the ability of others to excel.
- Recognize the creativity of others.
- Apply the lessons learned in the activities to a current organizational challenge
- Aligning the learning insights with industry needs.

#### The Challenges however are several:

- To ensure that the wisdom of every individual in the group is captured - and that no individual dominates the game etiquettes due to rank or personality.
- To ensure that the vision is an emergent one that reflects the collective hopes and desires of everyone in the group.
- To ensure that not just everyone's intelligence, but also their imagination is tapped.
- To ensure that the vision is converted in a few simple guiding principles that guide them step by step actions of the team.

Facilitators help hand-hold the teams to take the step-by-step journey in arriving upon a compelling task (vision).

#### Leadership Principles:

Here, I would like to bring forth 10 simple tips to develop principle centered leadership qualities which are easy to follow and practice on our routine. These allow us to keep a log to check our leadership behavior.

- i Love people and use things**
- ii Be simple and modest**
- iii Adaptable**
- iv Positive outlook**
- v Ethical**
- vi Envisioning**
- vii Integrity**



- viii Persuasiveness**
- xi Learning Nature**
- x Contribution**

With great Wishes of leadership career, I would like to summarize that there could be 100 different attributes of a leader, which are mostly personality ethics, but these above ten are attributes, which a principle-centered leader may follow for making a difference to his /her organization and community at large.

#### **IV CONCLUSION**

India, the world class human capital with trained talent force that excels in different domains and puts the country on growth track. To continue this growth and achieve many more successes we (Indians), need to



garner the demographic dividend through various steps like; industry – Academia Interface, aligning education with industry needs, Increasing employability through industry ready youth, Innovation through industry – Academia partnership, Grooming young leaders, strengthening strategies in Industry and academia, etc.

Among all, there exists a need for (academia) producing future leaders by

inculcating strong leadership qualities right from graduation level itself. To do this successfully, I strenuously believe Experiential Training beyond the four wall lectures (class room teaching) is a natural and one of the best methods to imbibe /develop leadership qualities.

Indeed, Experiential Training beyond the class room teaching (through lecture mode) involves every participant to get engrossed in to the activity or task assigned and makes them practically experience their knowledge as a skill. More than that participants get to evaluate their strengths and improvement areas (weaknesses) and they also share the learning insights or improved skill set through successful performance of the task. This type of practical learning in the lap of the Nature makes them feel self contented and also



#### **Inside Out Model**

helps them to carry forward the developed skill(s) that enable them to embrace the work place challenges (even personal challenges) and produce optimal results in their profession.

#### **RESOURCES**

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**Note:** This paper is a practical version of my own Training (Corporate and Professional Colleges) experiences since 2007.