



Why Leadership training fails.

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Did you know that Leadership Development is a [\\$366 billion dollar](#) industry globally? *Incredible, right?*

US companies alone spend almost \$14 billion annually on leadership development.¹

It's clear that everyone wants to learn about becoming a better leader.

¹ Laci Loew and Karen O'Leonard, *Leadership Development Factbook 2012: Benchmarks and Trends in U.S. Leadership Development*, Bersin by Deloitte, July 2012, bersin.com.

But despite being one of the biggest industries in the area of personal growth, many routes to improve today's leaders fall far short of meeting the expectations of those who invest in them.

If you've ever invested in leadership training, you'll understand. The day finishes, and everyone leaves on a high. They're pumped. They're full of excitement and vision, and are eager to put everything they've learned into practice.

But here's the thing - most leadership training fails.

This is the scary thing. All of those billions of dollars don't fuel leaders for the long term. Research into leadership training has shown that people revert back to old ways of thinking and doing things, and company performance [doesn't always improve](#).

Why does this happen? We're curious creatures here at [LeaderBits](#), and we set on a mission to find out.

We'll discover exactly why certain leadership training works, and some just fall at the first hurdle.

#1 - Overlooking context

When it comes to leadership training, many organizations overlook the context in which the training needs to be applied.

At a leadership seminar or workshop, there are usually several assumptions that don't always translate to individuals at a company. CEO mandates and styles of leadership differ widely, and it's not a 'one size fits all' scenario.

[Research by McKinsey](#) states:

"We have found that when a company cuts through the noise to identify a small number of leadership capabilities essential for success in its business—such as

high-quality decision making or stronger coaching skills—it achieves far better outcomes.”

#2 - Underestimating mindsets

In any room full of leaders, you'll have mindsets that vary widely in terms of success and failure. Some leaders may have developed a strong, resilient mindset, and others may only be on the first rungs of the ladder when it comes to their courage and confidence as a leader.

How can one training effectively scale to meet the needs of a thousand leaders?

By addressing individual mindsets, it can uncover root causes of unhelpful and ineffective behaviors, and every person's level is different.

This isn't always adopted in leadership programs as it only scratches the surface of where real change can actually happen.

By 'going deep', it causes discomfort, and that isn't always welcomed in organizations. Just like an athlete needs to stretch muscles in order to grow, so leaders must continually reach beyond their comfort zones in order to become more effective.

Take an example from the McKinsey study:

‘(A) company decided that difficult market conditions required its senior sales managers to get smarter about how they identified, valued, and negotiated potential deals. However, sending them on a routine finance course failed to prompt the necessary changes. The sales managers continued to enter into suboptimal and even uneconomic transactions because they had a deeply held mind-set that the only thing that mattered in their industry was market share,

that revenue targets had to be met, and that failing to meet those targets would result in their losing face. This mind-set shifted only when the company set up a “control tower” for reflecting on the most critical deals, when peers who got the new message became involved in the coaching, and when the CEO offered direct feedback to participants (including personal calls to sales managers) applauding the new behavior.’

This shows that in order to create deep and lasting change, one-on-one training works far better than a blanket approach.

#3 - Failing to measure results

How is the effectiveness of a 1 day seminar or leadership course demonstrated? Results are notoriously difficult to track, and many companies fail to see the ROI of Leadership training as measurements are not always in place.

After all, the best measure of success is behavior change, and sometimes that can take days, weeks, or months to be fully seen and integrated into one’s way of being.

Metrics might also include cost savings, employee retention, and increased productivity.

[Forbes](#) says:

‘without measurement tools in place, there's no way to know the business impact of your leadership investment. If you want to see the success of a leader, don't look at her. Look at what her team is doing. If folks are leaving the organization, or trying to find ways to work for someone else within it, there's a leadership disconnect.’

Did you know?

Companies that invest in their people boast significantly less voluntary turnover than industry peers. Replacing a lost employee can cost up to 400 percent of their salary.²

² <https://www.td.org/insights/key-leadership-behaviors-that-skyrocket-roi-on-training-programs>

How to have success with leadership training

So how do you have success with leadership training?

According to research, there are several factors that need to be in place. We'll go through each one in turn, and why it's so important to have these for ultimate success.

Make it habit-forming:

The organizational psychologist [Martin Lanik](#) says *'Like playing the piano, leadership is more about skills than knowledge. The only way to become a better leader is to improve your leadership skills through deliberate, sustained practice, and turning these skills into everyday habits.'* Lanik found 22 core skills practiced consistently among consistent leaders.

Habits are automatic, and are the best way to change behavior. All of the top leaders in the world talk about habits and how important they are for lasting leadership.

Be consistent:

However, it's important to make sure habits are repeated on a consistent basis.

A study done by Philippa Lally at University College London found that it took anywhere from 18 days to 254 days for people to form a [new habit](#). Small, incremental improvements are the key to success.

ProTip: Build infrastructure: Think less about how to push the hot issue of the moment and more about how to get people into a habit of improving at the same time every week. If the person knows *"On Fridays at 9am I improve for 10 minutes"* Now you have a weekly habit and any behavior you want to improve can be exercised and reinforced at this moment in time.

Keep it short:

If you attend a leadership training, keeping eight hours of information in your brain can be tough. It can be even more tough to put the fragments of what you've remembered into practice.

There are two modes that our brain has: focused and diffused. It's pretty much impossible to focus intensely for eight hours straight.

Zapier has some [tips for learning](#): *"It's important to let your brain relax for a while after a particularly intense session of study or practice, to give it time to connect the dots"*.

Be entertaining:

How can we make what we learn stick? Well, it's much more likely to be remembered if its engaging.

[65% of people are visual learners](#), and our brains are much more engaged by storytelling than anything else.

Traditional leadership seminars may be entertaining, but as they're usually just one-time events or over a short period, it's difficult to get traction.

Make information Action Based:

We can read all the leadership books in the world, and attend multiple seminars a year, but if we don't implement everything we've learned on a day to day basis, then no real changes would be made.

In order for leadership training to succeed, all information needs to have an action-based component. A researcher called Kolb termed it 'experiential learning' way back in 1984, and 'learning by doing' is by far the best way to know if you've actually learned it or not. [Peakon](#), the employee engagement experts, say:

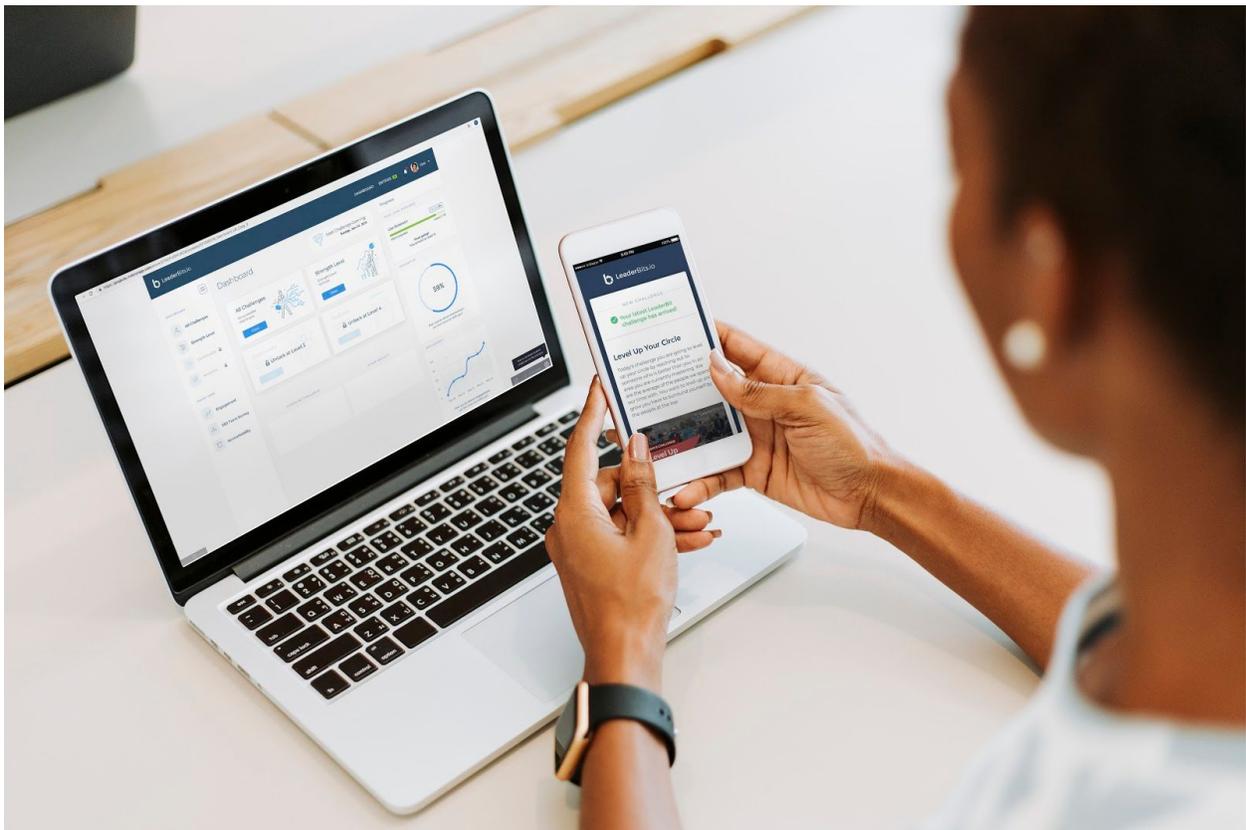
"Learning by doing is in our biology. Our brains are hard-wired to remember emotions, and when we connect learning to experiences, we're more likely to retain

the information in our long-term memory. This provides us with instant feedback on what we need to keep doing, what we need to change and what we need to repeat.”

LEADERBITS: AN ONLINE ACTION-BASED LEADERSHIP SOLUTION

In conjunction with top executives around the globe, we’ve developed LeaderBits©, an action-based leadership solution for organizations. The action based micro-content allows users to improve slowly and consistently.

Content is aligned directly to your company culture and scalable globally, and it’s trackable data allows leaders to document their progress over time.





“As the business landscape persistently grows in competitive intensity, every organizational member must be smarter. Therefore, continuous learning will be at the forefront of management's agenda to gain and sustain a competitive advantage. Learning will not be confined to formal training performed within the business. Learning will extend to a growing number of online micro-learning platforms”. - [Steven Maranville, Maranville Enterprises-The Venture Creation Corporation](#)

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