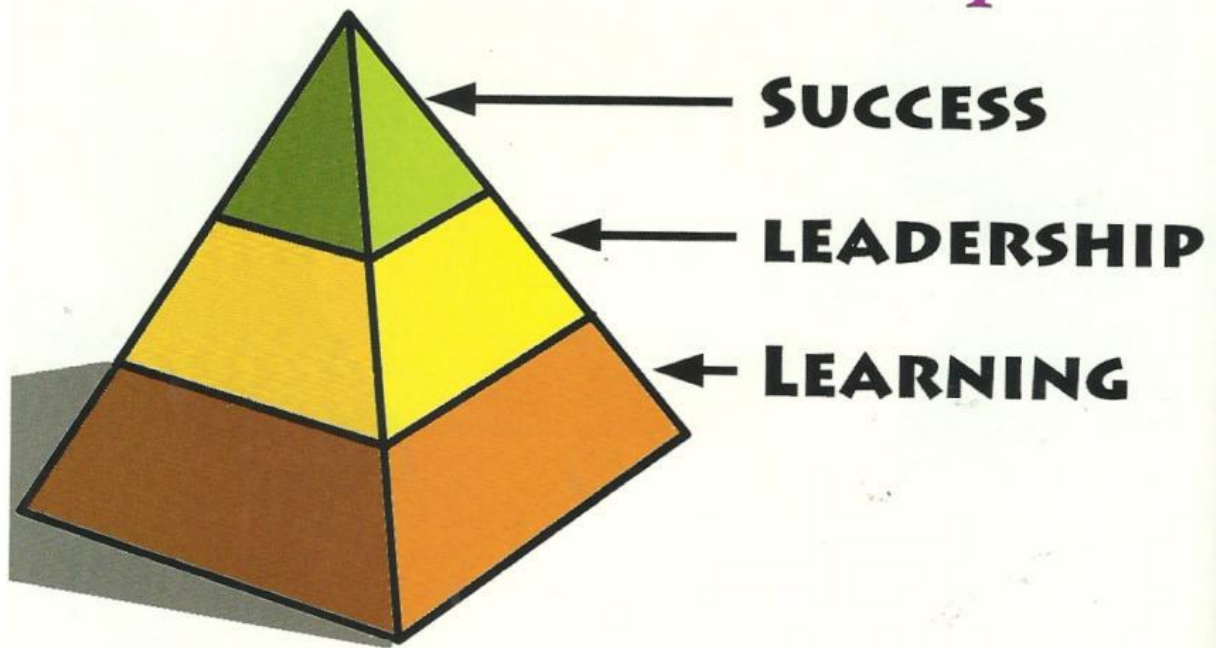


# Rediscovering Learning @ The Workplace



## What are your personal views on learning?

Learning is a continuous, voluntary and long-term process. It needs to be seen as relevant and important for employees and must not be thrust as a mandate by leaders or managers.

As a leader, in order to ensure that my organization has a thriving learning culture, I ensure that people are given both responsibility and the authority as learners. At the same time, one also has to ensure that a significant amount of time is invested both by the individual as well as the organization to facilitate learning among individuals and teams. Only then will employees be enthusiastic and embrace learning as a means to stay 'up-to-date'.

I also believe that learning need not happen with a pre-defined purpose. Often learning is confused with the word 'training'. While training is conducted with specific objectives in mind, learning need not have a direct, tangible or immediate impact. Therefore, in order to establish a true learning culture, organizations must give more emphasis to learning.

## What has been your biggest learning from the recruitment industry?

Having spent a number of years in the industry, I have realized that good hiring translates itself into having good bottom/top line for the organization. Organizations too have understood that employees are the best "assets"



one can invest in. Hence, recruiting “right” is essential to carry out any business. My biggest learning is that if marketing is promoting your product in the market-place, then recruitment is about promoting your organization to attract the bright, “right” talent, which in turn translates into better performance and thereby better a bottom line.

‡ **As a Leader, what is your personal learning agenda?**

My learning comes through multiple channels, both in my role as a leader as well as an individual. I have a three pronged agenda:

**Challenging Assignments**

I believe that a true leader learns through purposeful practice. One of the most powerful ways of learning is through stretch assignments; these are assignments that demand that we step outside our comfort zone and even develop new skills. Challenging assignments can include:

- Expansion of roles and responsibilities
- Increase in decision making authority
- Dealing with change and diversity
- Working on new and innovative projects
- Building new teams and capabilities
- Working in a different industry or country

I also learn by taking time to reflect on my experiences. One of the prerequisites of learning from experience is to develop a regular practice of reflection. Reflection is simply a quiet time, purposefully set aside, to cast our minds back and think about the events of the day or past week, with the clear intention of learning. By asking questions such as “what happened?”, “how did I react?” and “what can I do differently next time”, we learn valuable lessons.



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Barkat Charania holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Management from Mumbai University, Post Graduate Diploma in Business Management (PGDBM) from Symbiosis, Pune and currently pursuing his PHD. Starting his career as a recruiter and reaching to CEO within a short span of time, his career has developed through team leadership, business management and overall strategic management. He has also been a part of various projects related to Recruitment and HR outsourcing for the regulatory bodies for the Government of India. As a part of knowledge sharing, he often writes articles and columns for various publishing related to retail and have been a predominant speaker at various CXO level events and conferences.



## Developmental Relationships

We are social animals. I encourage learning by creating an environment where people can work in teams and thereby take advantage of the social aspects of learning. Encouraging teams to talk, share experiences and best practice accelerates learning. We must learn from discussions and feedback we receive from relationships and conversations with others. Here are some ways that we can encourage developmental relationships:

- Create small teams for new initiatives where team members can learn from each other.
- Identify opportunities for experts to work with others.
- Encourage coaching as an approach for the development of future leaders.
- Create meetings for people to gather and share their best practices and experiences.
- Create space to debrief and reflect on what's working, what could be improved and what should be stopped

## Formal Training & Reading

Formal learning occurs through courses, training, seminars, and workshops. Sadly, formal training does not always result in changed behavior. This is because effective learning requires a combination of formal training, developmental relationships and challenging assignments for maximum effect. In particular, I gain a lot of leadership insight and knowledge from reading books. It's important however to remember that while reading for personal

development, we must focus on reflecting and applying what we read.

## What have been the benefits that you have been able to reap as a result of 'Learning'?

"The best leaders are continually learning. They see all experiences as learning experiences. But there is a catch. Unexamined experiences don't produce the rich insights that come from reflection and analysis. If you want to become a better leader, you need to study your own performance and become more conscious about the choices that you are making and how you are acting on your intentions." (The Leadership Challenge Workbook by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, 2003.)

I am very conscious of studying the performance of my own, my team, my organisation and my clients as well. I am on a constant look out for ways and means to add value to every assignment that I take up.

Let me share my assignment with respect to recruitment. Contrary to what many people think, recruitment is very dynamic. The truth is that neither two clients and their requirements nor two candidates are the same. My learnings come from understanding these differences and applying this insight to my next assignment- which in turn results in better client satisfaction.

I also learn from the network of people I know and from attending relevant forums that keep me updated on the market trends and the industry.

Therefore, each agenda of learning helps me become better-personally and professionally. I also strongly believe that learning is incomplete, if it is not shared with a larger group. Therefore, I make it a point to keep my team updated on anything new that I learn.

## What can leaders do to imbibe a learning culture within organizations?

Among the many responsibilities that come with leadership, one that I'm particularly passionate about is facilitating the learning and growth of those who serve the organization. Here are some pointers that can help leaders weave learning into the fabric of the organization:

### 1. Focus On Behaviors To Create The Right Culture

'Focus on behaviors to change culture. Behaviors turn into attitudes, and attitudes become the culture.' – Bob Bennett, Vice President, Human Resources and CLO Global Organizational Learning Development and Services, FedEx Express

Successful learning organizations rely on good people behavior. Although training programs help in providing platforms to help employees gain clarity on what they can accomplish and how, we have to be mindful that it's the behaviors that employees see every day that help shape their attitude and understanding of what is acceptable to those in charge. The behavior we exemplify and evoke in others also serves to shape the real culture and values found in the organization.



It is therefore critical to educate employees on what behaviors are supported, thereby leading to improved learning at the workplace.

**2. Make efforts to understand employees better-where are they presently and where they want to go next.**

“We have to meet our employees where they are at and with what they need.” (Melissa Daimler, Head of Organizational Effectiveness & Learning, Twitter.)

One of the problems with most training programs are that they are created based on what those in charge want and not on what employees need. To facilitate the learning and development of employees and with it the growth of the organization, one needs to understand where employees are presently in their career development and what tools and resources they will need to begin the next stage of their growth.

Learning opportunities are not limited to time spent in training

sessions or classrooms, but can be found in everyday activities and events in the organization. It means not just assigning tasks to employees to keep them busy, but also giving them the tools to assess and evaluate where to go next and at times, why things went wrong.

**3. Create Forums to share learning**

“At the heart of social learning is connection.” (Liza Taylor, Director of Talent Development, Hulu)

For most of us, the fond memories we have of our school days are not just about what we learned, but of the teachers and friends who were a part of that learning journey. Being able to share about learning a new idea or technique is unquestionably important to the learning process. Consequently, as much as the organization should focus on what employees need to learn to become better contributors to the shared purpose, we also need to provide them with opportunities to share that process with others, be it through in-person gatherings or through internal company social media portals.

**Any suggestions for our readers.**

I would like to summarize my thoughts with a quote by Henry Ford which says “Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young.” Each one of us therefore needs to have the same inquisitiveness that we once possessed. This is not only to remain alert and aware of changes but also for growth and optimum utilization of our talents!

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