



# Lead with Learning

**The case for embedding learning in our teams**



**hannahbrown**

LEAD WITH LEARNING

## A note from Hannah



Hi there! I've been helping employees and leaders grow and succeed for 25 years. In that time, I have seen great advances in training design – from in-person to virtual and asynchronous e-learning – as well as great changes in how we live, work and learn in an increasingly digital world.

When I look at where we are today, I see the need for organizations to be more resilient and adaptable as change continues to come at us. I see leaders and their teams struggling to balance a desire for short-term results with the need to build cohesive, effective teams. I see employees disconnecting from work and quietly looking for alternatives, as the impacts of the recent pandemic continue to reverberate.

Our advancements in training design only go so far in addressing the many challenges that leaders and their teams face.

Our ability to learn and adapt is what will see us through – and that's what this whitepaper is all about.

I am passionate about changing performance. I am passionate about making sure learning is continuous and that it happens where leaders and their teams need it most – in their day-to-day work. I am a lifelong learner - always curious and always learning.

In the pages that follow, I provide an overview of my *Lead with Learning* approach to leading, developing employees and driving employee engagement, team performance and organizational adaptability.

This paper highlights the need for organizations to move beyond formal training and foster a culture of learning on their teams by developing employees and equipping leaders. Organizations are made up of individuals – they will adapt only to the extent that their employees are able to do so. Leaders are the conduit to make that happen.

If you are an existing client, I hope this whitepaper sparks a new idea or provides a new perspective. If we haven't yet had the pleasure of working together, I hope you find something to inspire a culture of learning for you and your team.

Sincerely, Hannah

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Hannah".

# The business case



We live and work in a world with economic uncertainty, global political unrest and accelerating change.

Brandon Carson, VP of Learning, Development and Partner Experience at Starbucks, identifies these three forces of change driving our digital age<sup>1</sup>:

- Migration and globalization resulting in megacities and the need for digital infrastructure
- Technology such as artificial intelligence and cloud computing, along with the proliferation of data
- Rapid transformation of work, which requires continuous learning, deeper problem solving, effective communication and collaboration

To respond successfully to these forces of change, organizations need to be resilient and adapt. Teams need to be at the top of their game. For all of this to happen, employees must be connected to and invested in their work.

The World Economic Forum<sup>2</sup> has identified curiosity and lifelong learning as one of the top 10 skills needed in 2023. This skill is essential for high-performing individuals and teams.

Resilient, adaptable organizations have superior economic performance. There is a clear link between an organization's culture of adaptability and its financial success.<sup>3</sup>

A recent McKinsey report<sup>4</sup> echoed these findings. It found that organizations that prioritize talent development and focus on performance success deliver top-tier profitability. They are more likely to become large-scale superstars with an average of \$1B more in economic profit than industry peers that

don't have a dual focus on performance and people.

The same McKinsey report identifies that 33% to 60% of employees across different global geographies plan on leaving their jobs. These are not insignificant numbers. Many of these are 'quiet quitters' who are detached from their work and organization, and are fulfilling their basic job requirements but nothing more. This type of low engagement costs the global economy US\$8.8 trillion, accounting for 9% of global GDP.<sup>5</sup>

When we consider the forces driving change and the need to adapt, it becomes clear that organizations need to develop team and employee capability. The same McKinsey report indicates that 90% of respondents feel their organizations need to act now or soon to build the capability to close their skill gaps. Yet, only 5% responded that their organizations are "all set" with addressing those gaps. The biggest barriers cited in the report are:

- Programs aren't tailored to specific skill gaps.
- Capability-building programs aren't integrated into employees' on-the-job experience.
- Organizations don't regularly review their ROI on learning programs, don't adequately measure desired outcomes or link training outcomes directly to business outcomes.

This disconnect between the need to build capability and the organization's ability to do so presents both a challenge and an opportunity. The barriers identified highlight the limitations of formal training. We need to go beyond that training and equip our leaders with the awareness and skills to nurture a learning mindset, along with a culture of learning on their teams.

# In response

*Leaders take different approaches to employee development and achieving results – some more effective and sustainable than others.*

## Production-focused

Production-focused leaders get results – at least temporarily. Because these leaders prioritize efficiency over innovation and learning, their success is not sustainable in the long term.

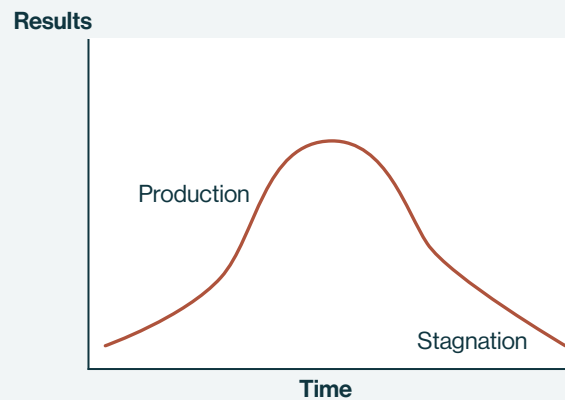
Henry Ford and the Ford Motor Company provide a cautionary example of valuing production and efficiency over creativity and innovation.

In creating the Model T in 1908, Henry Ford proclaimed that he wanted to “build a motor car for the great multitude.” He achieved his vision, and by 1921, he was producing 56% of all passenger cars in the United States. He kept the price low, so the Model T was affordable and maintained profits through volume and efficiency.

Ford became hyper-focused on reducing production costs, so much so that he missed the consumer need for greater variety. Ford didn't deviate from efficiency and failed to innovate and offer features like conventional gearshifts, hydraulic brakes instead of mechanical ones, and larger cylinder engines. By the late 1920s, General Motors and Chrysler started producing automobiles with these features. They steadily gained market share and eventually, the Ford Motor Company was third in sales in the industry, falling from number 1. Because of his single-minded focus on efficiency, Ford stopped experimenting and innovating and fell behind.

In an environment focused on production alone, there is little room for learning, curiosity and innovation. Leaders of such companies fail to build relationships with their employees that flow from prioritizing their development. They look to Human Resources to train employees and step in to solve performance issues – with predictable results.

### The Value of Lead with Learning



### Stagnation

As shown in the graph, over time, a production-focused organization will stagnate. Employees feel disconnected. They become the ‘quiet quitters’ because they don't feel valued or appreciated. They are given limited opportunity to grow and develop. They lack motivation to do their best. Their performance suffers, as does the team's. As a result, the organization is unable to weather short-term crises and adapt.

# The alternative

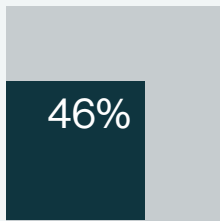
## Development-focused

A development-focused leader achieves sustainable results by focusing on their employees. They know work is done through their team members and so they focus on equipping them with the skills and resources they need, and by creating an environment where they can succeed.

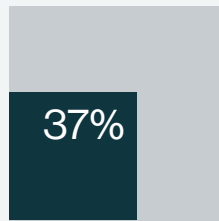
A growing body of research<sup>6</sup> has shown that focusing on learning goals (developing competence, acquiring skills, mastering new situations, etc.) instead of just performance goals (hitting targets, proving our competence, impressing others, etc.) boosts motivation. When employees are motivated by learning goals, they acquire more diverse skills, do better at work, and perform better on problem-solving tasks.

The leader's mindset is a key part of building an organization focused on learning and development alongside production. Leaders prioritize their own learning and they model curiosity. They demonstrate vulnerability and admit when they don't have answers. When experiments fail, they focus on learning from the experience to improve next time.

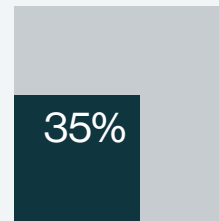
The leader's mindset informs the team culture they create. Leaders care about their employees, know them as people. They empathize with their challenges and celebrate their successes. This 'human-centred' leadership includes these aspects:<sup>7</sup>



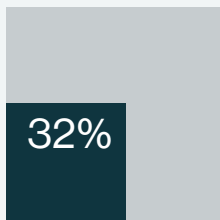
**1. Role modeling:** being a role model, focusing on building respect, and considering ethical consequences of decisions.



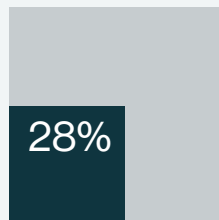
**2. Inspiring others:** presenting a compelling vision of the future and inspiring optimism about its implementation.



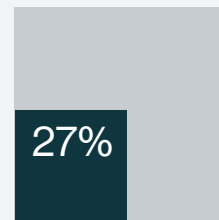
**3. Developing people:** spending time teaching, mentoring, and listening to individual needs and concerns.



**4. Setting expectations:** defining responsibilities clearly and rewarding achievement of targets.



**5. Fostering team discussions:** building a team atmosphere in which everyone is encouraged to participate in decision making.



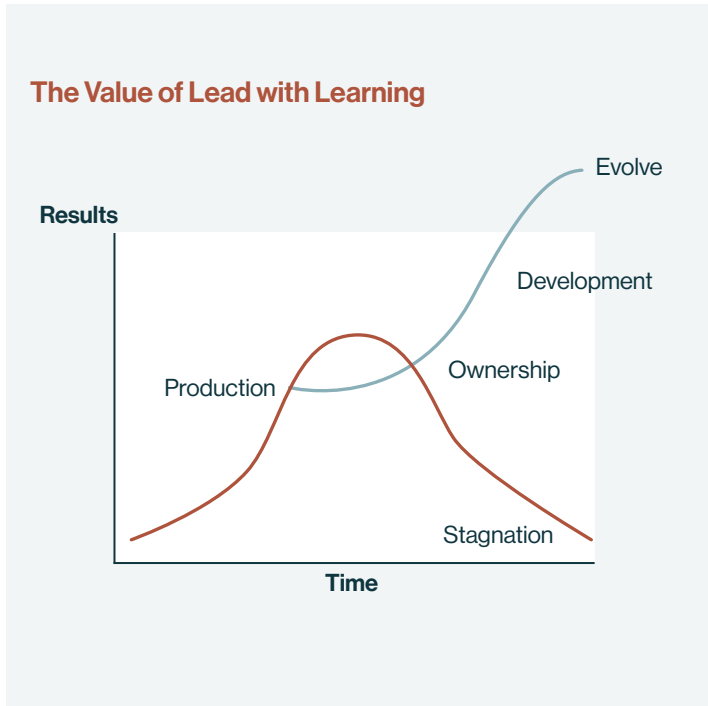
**6. Communicating efficiently:** communicating in a convincing and charismatic way.

The team achieves sustainable results through the employee's individual and team's collective performance. Employees are engaged, motivated and challenged in their roles. The author Daniel Pink<sup>12</sup> identifies autonomy, mastery and purpose as three main drivers for intrinsic motivation.

Furthermore, employees are inspired to learn and develop new skills and grow into new roles. When we can expand our interests, we not only fuel our curiosity but also become more confident about what we can accomplish and are more successful at work.<sup>13</sup>

**As the graph illustrates, the team overall meets and exceeds expectations:**

Leaders and their teams have a learning mindset and a culture of learning when they are focused on development alongside production. They get sustained results. The organization is resilient to short-term crises and more adaptable to long-term change. A recent McKinsey report stated, "Companies with capabilities in both adaptability and resilience are better able than others to absorb shocks and turn them into opportunities for capturing sustainable, inclusive growth. Leaders and teams in adaptable organizations are better prepared than others to assess the situation at hand, reorient themselves, double down on what's working, and walk away from what's not – and do it all quickly. With each bounce forward, they become more resilient."<sup>14</sup>



# The transition point



## Ownership

So, how do we move leaders from a production to a development approach? In a word:

### Ownership.

It starts with the leader's mindset – their understanding of who they are as a leader – and aligning it to the organization's expectations of them. That means owning the role of nurturing their employees' development.

These leaders are curious and encourage curiosity in others. They consider different perspectives and explore multiple solutions to problems. In contrast to the production-focused leader, who doesn't create room for learning, curiosity and innovation, this leader encourages experimentation and learning from failure.

A recent McKinsey report<sup>8</sup> identified that organizations that focus on people and performance success have a competitive advantage. They challenge and empower employees and foster bottom-up innovation. They are 4.2 times more likely than average companies to remain in the top quintile of their sector's return on investment capital.

## Evolving – A brighter future

As leaders continue to nurture a learning mindset in themselves and with their teams, they become beacons inside their organizations for other leaders and teams to follow.

“An organization is only as resilient as its people. That's why it's so critical for business leaders to encourage adaptability among employees and equip them with tools that allow them to work as quickly as situations dictate. McKinsey research suggests that employees who are more adaptable tend to have an edge in managing change and adversity.”<sup>9</sup>

“It's important to find and promote adaptable leaders who don't just react when faced with, say, a natural disaster, a competitor's moves, or a change in team dynamics. They take the time to coach team members through the change. They catalyze new behaviors, and they develop capabilities that can help set the conditions for both a short-term response and long-term resilience.”<sup>10</sup>

More than 60% of respondents<sup>11</sup> report that organizational resilience will be more important in the future. Yet many feel organizations are not well prepared.

*The time is now to embrace employee development at a team level and equip leaders with the awareness and skills to do so effectively.*

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.”

~ Charles Darwin

# Lead with Learning program

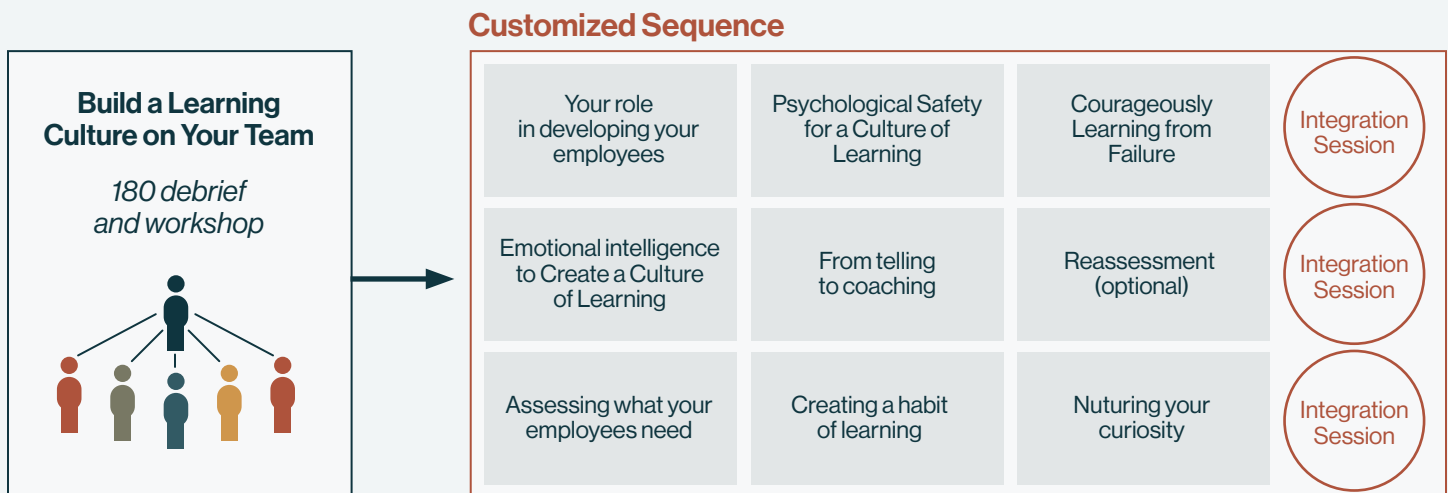
The Lead with Learning program helps leaders nurture a learning mindset and foster a learning culture in their teams. It increases their awareness of what's needed and helps them develop the skills to improve employee engagement, increase performance and develop resilience and adaptability.

I offer this program in two formats.

## Lead with Learning: Teams

<b>Audience</b>	For intact teams – leaders and their direct reports
<b>Allows for</b>	Targeted team transformation
<b>Components</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead with Learning 180° assessment and report</li> <li>• 1:1 session with leader to review report and discover insights into their leadership approach</li> <li>• Team session to review report and discuss insights into team learning and culture</li> <li>• Courses in a customized sequence to address the team's most pressing needs</li> <li>• Integration session after three courses to incorporate skills and learning</li> <li>• Virtual impact session for team accountability</li> </ul>
<b>Outcomes</b>	<p>Leaders will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop awareness of how the leader's current approach helps or hinders building a culture of learning and achieving sustainable results.</li> <li>• Develop skills to nurture curiosity in themselves and others.</li> <li>• Practise experimentation and being vulnerable to create space for learning from failure.</li> <li>• Develop habits to support ongoing learning.</li> <li>• Identify their role in supporting their employees' development.</li> <li>• Gain awareness of and develop emotional intelligence skills to adapt to different situations.</li> <li>• Develop skills to ask questions instead of giving advice.</li> </ul>

This is an illustration of the Lead with Learning: Teams approach. The customized sequence of the courses is determined by the leader and their team.



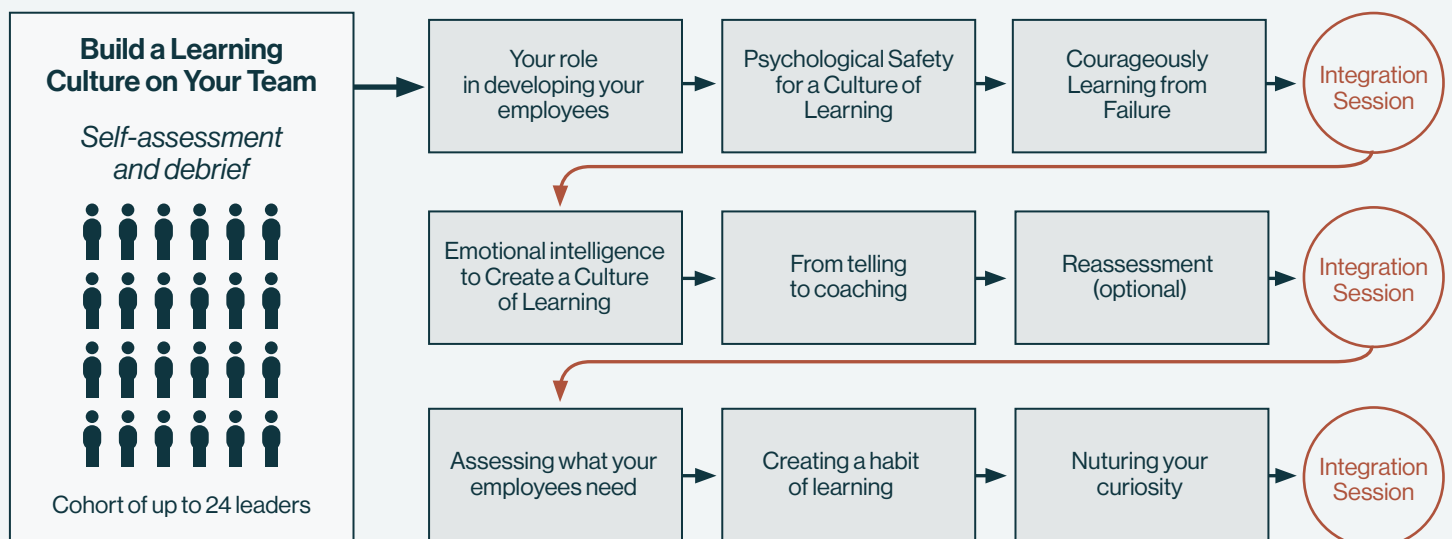


## Lead with Learning: Leaders

<b>Audience</b>	For groups of leaders in an organization
<b>Allows for</b>	Larger-scale implementation across multiple leadership teams in an organization
<b>Components</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead with Learning self-assessment and report</li> <li>• 1:1 session with leader to review report and discover insights into their leadership approach</li> <li>• Courses in a standard sequence to develop skills for leading and developing a culture of learning</li> <li>• Integration session after three courses to incorporate skills and learning</li> <li>• Virtual impact session for leader accountability</li> </ul>
<b>Outcomes</b>	<p>Leaders will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop awareness of how the leader's current approach helps or hinders building a culture of learning and achieving sustainable results.</li> <li>• Develop skills to nurture curiosity in themselves and others.</li> <li>• Practise experimentation and being vulnerable to create space for learning from failure.</li> <li>• Develop habits to support ongoing learning.</li> <li>• Identify their role in supporting their employees' development.</li> <li>• Gain awareness of and develop emotional intelligence skills to adapt to different situations.</li> <li>• Develop skills to ask questions instead of giving advice.</li> </ul>

This is an illustration of the Lead with Learning: Leaders approach. The courses follow a standard sequence

### Lead with Learning: Leaders Standard Sequence



### Which approach can bring about the biggest change in your organization?

Let's have a conversation about how I can help. [hannah@hannahbrown.co](mailto:hannah@hannahbrown.co) or call +1 (519) 590-8027

## About Hannah Brown



## Next steps

If this whitepaper has resonated with you, and you can see the value of my approach for your team, I'd love to work with you.

### Reach out to me at:

[hannah@hannahbrown.co](mailto:hannah@hannahbrown.co)

or call +1 (519) 590-8027

*I bring my 25 years of experience helping learning professionals create and implement formal training programs for leaders and their teams to build a learning culture. I bridge the gap between formal training and learning embedded in the DNA of teams.*

This is the focus of my upcoming book, *Lead with Learning*.

I have received two design awards from the Institute for Performance and Learning (I4PL).

- [2021](#) – Redesign for Online: Process, template and support
- [2019](#) – Risk Management elearning and facilitated program with my client, Shad Canada

In addition to my consulting experience, I was the Director of Sales Training for North America at Foresters Financial in Toronto.

As a firm believer in life-long learning, I have the following degrees and certifications:

- B.A.Sc. from the University of Guelph
- M.Ed. (Adult Education) from O.I.S.E./University of Toronto
- Life Insurance license (Levels 1 & 2) through FSCO
- CTDP from the Institute for Performance and Learning (I4PL)
- Certified Coach through Integral Coaching Canada, which is recognized by the International Coach Federation (ICF).

My recent book, [Training that Clicks: Virtual Design Playbook](#), is for people who design virtual training and don't have a learning and development background, and for people looking for ways to elevate their virtual courses so they're more engaging and have a greater impact.

## Endnotes

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