7 Tips For
Developing Leaders
In The Age Of Millennial Management

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LEADx

FOREWORD

Analysts describe our modern workforce as **The Era of Millennial Management**. We learn from Deloitte that millennials will make up more than 75% of the workforce by 2025, though most organizations admit they are underprepared to fill the massive leadership gap caused by this transformation.

As baby boomers retire at a pace of 10,000 a year, existing leaders will soon vacate important roles, leaving a void too large for talent acquisition professionals to fill in today's increasingly competitive job market.

If we believe — as the research suggests — that strong leadership directly influences many important business outcomes, then closing this leadership gap looms overhead every organization looking to achieve meaningful success over the long-term.

Some organizations will effectively lead this transformation and will enjoy a host of competitive advantages among their peers such as superior employee retention, employee productivity, employee safety, employee diversity, employee engagement, and customer satisfaction.

Others who do not successfully navigate this change will unfortunately fall victim to lethal combinations of employee attrition, decreased employee engagement, and decreased customer satisfaction. Cultivating the next crop of effective leaders has never been more mission critical.

We are grateful for and inspired by leaders like you who are actively preparing the nearly one in four millenials who are "asking for a chance" to prove their leadership ability. On behalf of the entire LEADx team, I express our collective confidence in you as their guide and in the collective potential for this generation to make their mark on the world.

Congratulations on making it here, where we will teach you principles that will help you build leadership development programs that are effective for this rising generation of leaders. We are honored to be on this journey with you.

Best,

Kevin Kruse
Founder & CEO

LEADx

Most training and development professionals believe they are already providing personalized solutions to their learners. They cite "blended learning" curricula (e.g., print, e-learning, live workshops) to appeal to different learning styles, and also levels of mastery — beginner, intermediate, expert — as ways to tailor the content itself.

However, when today's millennial leaders discuss personalization, they are reflecting their experience outside of work as consumers of media. They take for granted the custom movie recommendations from Netflix, the daily custom playlist from Spotify, and the books "Recommended for You" on Amazon. Each recommendation is of course based on algorithms that factor in prior use, ratings, and popularity in general.

"We spent a crazy amount of time identifying and understanding our strengths, but then the training totally ignores all that. The team building course was exactly the same whether you are an Activator or a Developer." — Katrina F., age 29

"Don't make me search for it. Let me know what is popular for people who are like me, in my same role." — Tara M., age 33

Personalization of training for tomorrow's leaders will go far beyond the simple groupings of learning styles or experience. Personalization means individualization. In many organizations, what is known about individuals includes personality type, communication style, strengths, competencies, career path, performance and experience. Increasingly, learners will expect that all of those factors, and more, will be used to tailor instructional content down to the sentence level.

Due to the cost, coaches are most often reserved for senior executives. While this model allows great leaders to get even better, new leaders who would disproportionately benefit from a coach have ironically been unable to access a coach. Some organizations are trying to solve this economic problem by experimenting with "peer coaching" models or teaching current managers to use a "coaching style" with their direct reports.

While these experiments help new leaders learn faster than trial and error alone, many new leaders experience better results when they are paired with a coach who can share a trained external perspective, motivated entirely by helping the learner achieve their goals. Coaches are most effective when working with individuals outside a traditional reporting structure, so learners can feel comfortable going through the learning and growth process in an environment that does not jeopardize formal performance appraisals or recommendations for compensation adjustments.

Proper coaching forces leaders to clarify their own personal and professional goals, which is almost always overlooked as new leaders often try to do more of the operational things that landed them the promotion in the first place. Coaches expand leaders' field of vision by brainstorming options to achieve those goals and speak with a tenor of experience when anticipating potential obstacles that might obstruct a leader's path.

With the promise to make a willing heart more self-aware, more confident, more determined, more resilient, it is a mystery why professionals would embark on another day without enlisting a coach in their corner.

Before floppy disks were removed from the premises, millennials plugged into self-guided, on-demand access to the world's knowledge in their first grade school computer lab. Consider how flexing this over-practiced, on-demand learning muscle over a lifetime influences preferences on finding answers to millennials' biggest questions.

We miss an enormous opportunity to draft alongside already appreciated learning preferences if we offer a less flexible learning path than can be answered by the world's most YouTubed questions. (For the curious, two such examples are "how do I get rid of the hiccups" and "how do I grow a beard?")

When it comes to on-demand learning, millennial preferences are clear; they expect the flexibility they usually see in consumer applications.

Most training programs are called "one and dones" and are used to solve one-time problems, but no training professional I know actually believes leadership skills can be acquired with that approach.

There are at least two main problems with learning skills without the proper reinforcement:
1. One-day braindumps rarely transfer into new behaviors, let alone memory.
2. In most organizations, somewhere between 10-20% of new leaders will come on board or be promoted over the next year, giving a substantial hurdle to even the most brilliant of workshops.

These challenges may be most recognizable to small and medium sized businesses that feel their only option is the one and done because of limited budgets, but even eLearning courses will often deliver a scheduled regimen such as "week 2: read this book, take these courses, and pass the test."

Trainers at larger companies mistakenly feel that they are taking advantage of this principle because they engage new leaders with their well-defined leadership program over a year. It would be difficult to overemphasize enough that leadership development is something that should never end. Leadership trainers need to always provide new content, new challenges, and new ways to become a better learner.

Consider the new leader preparing for a difficult one on one meeting with one of their direct reports. They need a few quick tips on delivering feedback in this high stakes "make or break" management moment.

Sadly, the content this new leader needs is buried deep within long form leadership development courses. Your new leader needs to be able to find bite-sized content when she runs into a problem while she's doing her job. Your average employee only has 24 minutes to learn per week so bite-sized learning is truly the only option to reach most of your workforce.

Imagine what happens when you apply consistent, bite-sized learning across that gadget your learners are almost entirely addicted, their phone. Magic happens when we put that already programmed dopamine response to work in teaching our next generation of leaders. With a push notification or two throughout the day, you can all but guarantee that a handful of the 2,617 daily times we touch our phone on average will help reinforce concepts learned in your leadership development program.

Delivering micro-learning on mobile will help you be where your employees already are.
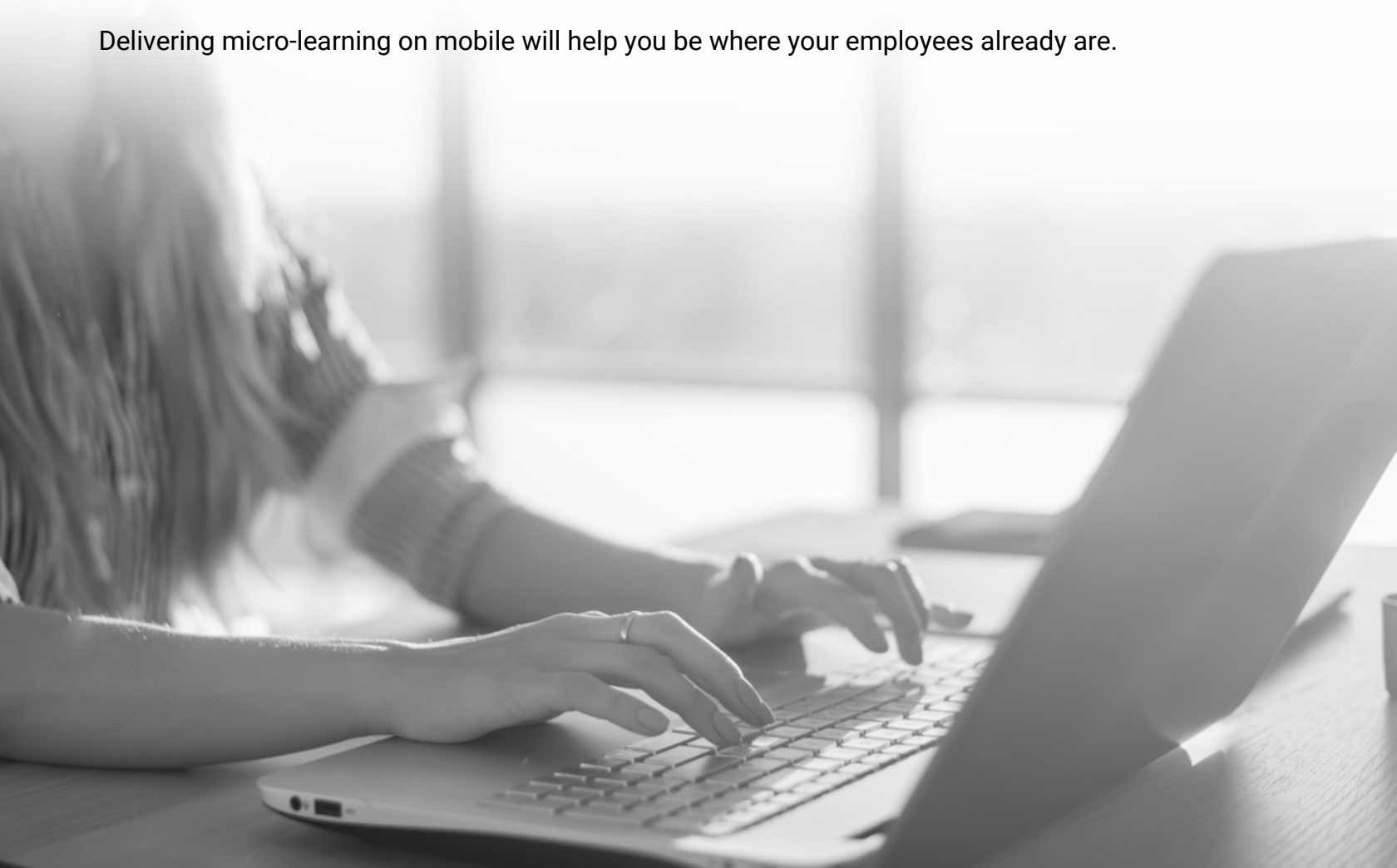
Trainers can learn from a great coach, Vince Lombardi, who reviewed the most fundamental concepts with his team even after making it to the Super Bowl as coach of the Green Bay Packers. "This is a football," Lombardi famously monologued in his first practice of every year.

These people had played the sport for decades and were by every measure among the most talented and developed professionals in their field. Why would Lombardi spend precious time explaining the rules of the game, dimensions of the field, and team makeup to an audience that knew these details like the back of their hand?

As successful leaders in our respective disciplines, we often feel like we know the core of management fundamentals, but how often do we botch an important session of delivering effective feedback or providing support to a direct report in one on ones? How often do we miss an opportunity to coach teammates or delegate a task we should really be entrusting in their care?

Perhaps the most universal sin of all is the frequency in which we misstep in our communication. Maybe we failed to listen actively in a critical conversation, to keep a meeting on track with its intended purpose, or to present an idea effectively to the executive team.

Lombardi reminds us that the best among us may have blind spots or at least room to apply the basics more frequently. New leaders are not excused from this reality when it comes to mastering the basics of management and communication fundamentals.

From your resting heart rate to the remaining distance you can drive without refueling your vehicle, technology provides an ease and breadth of metrics we could have only dreamed of a few decades ago. When you use the feedback provided by modern learning technologies, you can source feedback on nearly every aspect of your leadership development program.

You have a decision ahead of you to be deliberate in the metrics that best illustrate the success you want to see in your organization. Focusing on the correct measures — especially when measuring leadership development for the first time — seems to be equal part thoughtful deliberation and trial/error. In this spirit, you may find it is truly better to get started than to get your dashboard perfect.

If you are measuring time your leaders spend on eLearning tools, do you want that number to be low or high? Do you want to see high concentration on course adoption in one topic to address an acute area of need or across several disciplines to show that you are providing content to help across a variety of issues your leaders are facing? Would you be interested in finding commonly searched content that your workforce needs but you are not providing?

You will want to be deliberate in the outcomes you are trying to achieve while deciding which quantitative and qualitative measures are most important for your business.

"You can't manage what you can't measure." - Peter Drucker

Bringing It All Together

You made it! Here are your 7 tips to developing leaders in the age of millennial management:

1. Personalize to Your Learner
2. Put a Coach in Their Corner
3. Embrace Search, Rewind, and Fast Forward
4. Reinforce Continual Learning
5. Teach Where Your Employees Learn
6. Encourage Mastery of the Basics
7. Measure and Improve

Now you have them on a single page that you can tape next to your monitor. Bonus points for tagging LEADx on social media with a selfie that proves you did it. :)

Thank you for caring enough to share your time and talents to develop the next generation of leaders. On behalf of the entire LEADx team, I hope our paths cross yours again soon as we ignite the leadership potential within those around us.

Try Out LEADx

If you want to learn how the LEADx leadership development platform can help you build leaders in today's modern workforce, we would love to meet with you to show you the goods.

Check out the world's first AI-powered leadership acceleration platform, LEADx with Coach Amanda. You are going to love it.

As always, keep up the good work out there! Don't hesitate to reach out if we can do anything to help.

See LEADx In Action

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kevin Kruse is a New York Times bestselling author, Forbes columnist, and Founder+CEO of LEADx, with the ten year mission to spark 100 million new leaders around the world. LEADx with Coach Amanda is the first leadership enablement platform built with IBM Watson artificial intelligence.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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