



June 2009 - Leadership Letter (39)

"LEARNING TO LEAD"

Hello Everyone!

Recent work with a long-term client, Hixson Architects/Engineers, has pushed me to review and rethink my past experiences with leadership development.

Hixson has had a strong emphasis on quality management and leadership development for years.

They are driving now toward improving their leadership development training, but **also** broadening it **beyond** training to all their practices that cause leaders and potential leaders to develop better and faster.

As part of this effort, it was one of my roles to find useful research and insights on leadership development. That led to my rediscovering an "old but good" piece on ***Learning to Lead***.

The newly tweaked version is on the following pages; hope you enjoy it and find something useful in our review and analysis of Conger's book!

All the best,

Mel

Mel Hensey, PE, F.ASCE
Management Consulting Engineer
Hensey Associate
8220 Riversedge Cir., Maineville, OH 45039
513/919-7672, MHensey@aol.com

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BOOK REVIEW AND ANALYSIS ...

LEARNING TO LEAD: The Art of Transforming Managers into Leaders

Jay A. Conger

1992

Jossey-Bass

Conger's book is extraordinary because he went "undercover" to experience five of the **nation's most popular leadership programs**. Much of his book uses a diary format as well as interviews and course materials from ...

- Tom Peters Group's Leadership Challenge
- Center for Creative Leadership's programs
- Forum Corporation's leadership course
- Other "personal growth" leadership courses

Chapter Eight provides a helpful analysis of the effectiveness of the various leadership development approaches. Overall, Conger notes that a high percentage of participants had very memorable experiences. **Far fewer** noted real or lasting changes! (That squares very well with our own experience).

Chapter Nine offers thoughts about the **future of leadership training**. While his observations of leading companies' training (GE, Levi Strauss) and his own suggestions are important, **they aren't enough to remedy what's missing in most leadership development programs and practices ...**

- Conger's book is about **Learning to Lead**.
- He discusses and evaluates leadership **training**.
- But, training is only one sub-set of "**education**."
- And, education is only one sub-set of "**learning!**"

Conger argues that we do not completely understand adult education. I agree. However, several companies seem to have mastered leadership development **practices** beyond training and education.

Following are some **more** effective practices for leadership **development** by a very old and very successful firm, Procter & Gamble; and by a newer and very successful company, Southwest Airlines, as well as other smaller, but very successful firms, like Hixson, Terracon, and Walker Parking, among others.

- ⊕ **Careful Recruiting:** First, foremost and way above everything else ... they **recruit** people very carefully and well. They know that a new hire may impact the firm for twenty to forty years. They hire people who are very **capable** of developing and growing to a higher level of responsibility! (Many claim to do this, few actually do.)
- ⊕ **Coaches and Mentors:** They know that every member deserves a good coach, usually his/her manager. **All** coaches need to be effective coaches. High performers may welcome a mentor as well, though it's not usually his/her boss. And coaching and mentoring are different.
- ⊕ **Skills Training:** When they offer training, and they do a lot of training, it's demanding, interactive, effective, and focused on **specific** management skills and practices, like these:
 - careful selection and recruiting
 - successful project management
 - facilitating effective teamwork
 - performance reviews that "work"
- ⊕ **OJT Opportunities:** They provide high potential employees with special assignments and opportunities for their development, such as ...
 - process improvement projects
 - leading/serving on task groups
 - leadership in professional groups
 - community service assignments
 - short-term special assignments
 - "shadowing" senior leaders at work
- ⊕ **Outside Opportunities:** When they offer out-of-house training and development ... it's on some **new** skill, practice, concept, or process. And they expect participants to "**bring it back**" to the firm by way of: trip reports, brown bag lunches or in-house seminars, and share it with others.

Thanks to Dave Gaboury, CEO of Terracon Consultants, headquartered in Lenexa, Kansas, for helping me find this excellent book, ***Learning to Lead***, and to Mark Frey, VP of Hixson Architects & Engineers of Cincinnati, Ohio, for stimulating me to think again about developing leaders.



Mel Hensey, Management Consulting Engineer, Hensey Associates
8220 Rivers Edge Cir., Maineville, OH 45039
MHensey@aol.com
www.henseyassociates.com