

Leading at Scale

# Achieve Success in High-Potential Leadership Development Programs





# Introduction

So, you launched a high-potential development program to help create strong, scalable leadership now and for the future, and the results have been...meh. Why?

**Consider these five reasons your program may be failing:**

- Lack of focus on key capabilities
- Emphasis on content rather than behavior change
- Failure to leverage a blended approach
- Lack of customization
- Absence of measurement

**That failure can have serious consequences for your organization, including:**

- Loss of competitive edge
- Stagnation in the leadership pipeline
- Reduced organizational performance
- Increased recruitment costs
- Decreased employee engagement and retention

Enter RHR's Leading at Scale leadership development program, which helps your talent develop the skills required to take on more complex, scalable roles and your business to develop a strong leadership pipeline. Here's why you need it and how it works.



A hand holding a camera lens against a blue sky background. The lens is on the left side of the frame, and the hand is visible at the bottom left. The background is a clear blue sky with some light clouds.

# 1 Lack of focus on key capabilities

The purpose of an executive development program is to create a meaningful competitive advantage for the organization. To maximize return on investment (ROI) in creating competitive advantage, organizations should build leaders who can excel in enterprise-critical roles. The capabilities required for enterprise leadership are largely consistent across industries, geographies, markets, and time. Nevertheless, they are not the primary focus of most executive development programs. Instead, programs often overindex on trending topics or the organization's competency framework, newest set of values, etc. Each component of a high-impact development program needs to link directly to the core capabilities of enterprise leadership. A diligent and unwavering emphasis on the core capabilities ultimately accelerates a leader's readiness to scale, strengthens the organization's leadership pipeline, and creates meaningful competitive advantage for the business.

## 2 Emphasis on content rather than behavior change

A favorite scene in the film *Moneyball* is where Jonah Hill's character tells Brad Pitt's, "People who run ball clubs, they think in terms of buying players. Your goal shouldn't be to buy players, your goal should be to buy wins. And in order to buy wins, you need to buy runs." Analogously, people often think about development programs in terms of buying content. But the goal shouldn't be to buy content; the goal should be to buy a stronger pipeline of enterprise leaders. To develop enterprise leaders based on the core capabilities mentioned above, you want to buy two things: insight and behavior change. A high-impact development program is resolutely focused on helping leaders cultivate insight about the business, their impact on others, and themselves. Just as importantly, a high-impact program gives leaders an explicit and tested roadmap for translating that insight into meaningful behavior change. In terms of shifting mindsets and behavior, content is of limited value. Many programs ignore this important reality and end up being overly academic rather than more applied.



# 3 Failure to leverage a blended approach

To maximize ROI, executive development programs need to combine the best elements of group learning and one-on-one coaching. In our experience, leaders grow the most when leveraging a network to support a development journey that is highly tailored to the individual's needs.

The most common complaint we hear from emerging enterprise leaders about a previous coaching experience goes something like this: "All the coach did was ask me a lot of questions without ever giving me any of the answers or offering advice." The approach described, which emphasizes self-directed discovery, is the one taught and advocated for by many of the largest and best-known coaching-certification providers.

It has its place at certain levels in an organization but is a very poor fit for emerging and existing enterprise leaders, many of whom look to a coach to be more of an expert advisor.

Emerging enterprise leaders benefit most by working with coaches who know a lot of the answers and share them in a manner that feels exploratory, collaborative, and not heavy-handed. At a bare minimum, a coach needs to share expertise when: 1) integrating assessment data to inform the leader's most critical development opportunities; 2) offering deep insight about the leader's style, tendencies, impact, etc.; 3) devising a clear and executable roadmap for behavior change; and 4) facilitating successful and sustainable behavior change. All these



requirements are predicated on the coach being a seasoned expert in what it really takes to lead at scale and how leaders can most efficiently and effectively increase their readiness to do so.

There are several critical benefits to group-based learning when developing enterprise leaders. Benefits are more fully realized when group sessions place less emphasis on content and more on insight and behavior change. To be sure, enterprise leadership necessitates a highly nuanced skillset that is difficult to acquire in a vacuum. RHR's research indicates that leaders grow more during a program when they engage peers, thought partners, mentors, etc. in support of their development. When designed correctly, group sessions allow enterprise leaders to

practice key skills, such as leveraging others to solve problems and formulate conclusions in complex situations. Practically speaking, there are efficiencies to be gained by addressing shared development opportunities in a group format. Finally, a group of emerging enterprise leaders can be a critical lever in advancing key organizational imperatives. To maximize the value of every dollar invested, a program should align participants around and create a call to action for strategic priorities relating to growth, organizational transformation, culture change, etc.



# 4 Lack of customization

Program sponsors often make the mistake of buying an off-the-shelf solution. To optimize impact, a program needs to be customized and embedded within the broader ecosystem within which the leader operates. Insights are more robust and new behaviors more easily acquired when leaders work through real business challenges that need to be addressed. Coaches are more effective when they've been sufficiently oriented to the business. Group sessions have more impact when leaders work jointly to navigate obstacles and capitalize on opportunities. A program's ROI goes up significantly when it is utilized to advance key strategic initiatives, a goal that can only be achieved through customization.

# 5 Absence of measurement

To truly assess and maximize ROI, measurement is essential and needs to occur at different stages of an executive development program. However, in most programs, the measurement component is either shortchanged or implemented with a lack of rigor. Preferably on the front end of the program, a robust and psychometrically sound assessment provides direction regarding an individual's strengths and development opportunities. When used with larger cohorts, assessment data can serve as a critical input in succession planning and talent roundtable conversations. Aggregate assessment data helps illuminate trends and shared development opportunities across a cohort as well. As the program progresses, feedback on group learning sessions allows for improvements and subtle course corrections where needed. Bidirectional feedback helps optimize and enhance one-on-one coaching. Leaders provide feedback on whether the coach is meeting their needs and expectations; coaches provide feedback on whether the leader is engaged, developmentally oriented, etc. At the conclusion of the program, outcome assessments should be used to demonstrate impact. Here, so-called "happy sheets" are insufficient. Instead, the manager should evaluate the amount of progress made against development goals and whether a leader is better equipped for a role of greater scope and complexity. The size of successor pools—and whether they have grown larger—can also be used as a metric for program impact.





# The Impact of a Weak High-Potential Development Program

What happens when your high-potential development program doesn't work?

The consequences can be far-reaching:

- 1 Loss of competitive edge:** Without effective development plans, organizations risk falling behind competitors who are investing in their top talent. High-potential employees are often the future leaders and innovators, and failing to nurture their growth can result in a lack of fresh ideas and diminished competitive advantage.
- 2 Stagnation in the leadership pipeline:** A weak development program can lead to stagnation in the leadership pipeline, leaving the organization unprepared for future leadership needs. This can create a gap in succession planning, making it difficult to fill critical leadership roles internally, which can result in costly external hires.
- 3 Reduced organizational performance:** High-potential employees who are not effectively developed may not reach their full potential, leading to suboptimal performance across the organization. This can affect overall productivity.
- 4 Increased recruitment costs:** The cost of recruiting and onboarding new employees is significantly higher than retaining and developing existing talent. Inadequate development programs can lead to higher attrition rates, thereby increasing recruitment costs and disrupting organizational continuity.
- 5 Decreased employee engagement and retention:** High-potential employees who do not see a clear path for their development and advancement within the organization are more likely to become disengaged. This lack of engagement can lead to increased turnover rates, as these employees may seek other opportunities where they feel their talents and ambitions are better supported.

# RHR's Approach: Leading at Scale

Leading at Scale is RHR's flagship development program, which is:

1. Focused on the key capabilities for successful enterprise leadership
2. Designed to cultivate deep insight and sustainable behavior change
3. Integrated to combine the best elements of one-on-one coaching and group development
4. Customizable and built-in collaboration with our clients

5. Measurable and effective: As judged by their managers, participants make significant progress against 93% of their development goals, and 91% increase their readiness for roles of greater scope and complexity.

Leading at Scale enables you to identify and cultivate your future leaders. It helps your key talent develop the skills required to take on more complex, scalable roles and your business to develop a strong leadership pipeline. It addresses the five reasons many high-potential leadership programs fail—and keeps your leadership pipeline flowing.

## Let's Talk

To learn more about Leading at Scale and how RHR can help your organization develop a successful high-potential leadership development program, reach out to:



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