



N E X T G E N C E N T E R

GROW YOUR OWN
LEADERSHIP



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The opportunity and ROI of developing your leaders

A COMMON TALE ▶▶▶

Your company is growing and your primary focus is delivering results by scaling a high-performing team.

You consider the following:

- ▶ Hiring more experienced people from outside of the company who have “been there before” as leaders.
- ▶ Tapping into your existing people and team who have limited or less experience.

You decide to grow your team from within your organization because they are hard-working, smart, and dedicated people with big ambitions. You know them and they already know you. Your track record with them outweighs their lack of experience.

They excel in their role as individual contributors, so you promote them to roles where they manage others. You expect they will perform well in these new roles, as they have previously. They will “figure it out,” just as they have before.

But performance and growth wavers. People-related drama increases, followed by employee turnover. The team spends its days fighting the next “fire” while growth initiatives end up on the “when we have time” list.

The team is getting in its own way. The lack of experience and skill sets becomes evident. You wonder what you can do. How can you break the cycle? How can you deliver on your primary focus?

Knowledge, skills, and abilities - *not titles* - make effective leaders

Effective leaders and teams aren't just happy accidents. And individual contributors who are "good at their job" don't necessarily have the knowledge, skills, and abilities for leadership and management.

The good news is that skill sets for leadership can be developed. When an organization invests resources and time into providing intentional, practical, and purposeful opportunities to develop and grow, the ROI is tangible and measurable:

Performance how each team member delivers value to the organization on a daily basis

Retention holding onto talented people for longer periods of time

Recruitment attracting qualified candidates to expand your team and capabilities

Satisfaction helping people across the organization feel connected to the company's values and vision and fulfilled by their own contributions

Many times, companies will send employees to offsite workshops or half-day seminars for leadership development. But data shows that "participants often return to the office from such events energized and enthusiastic only to be stifled by the reality of company life."

You may have even experienced this yourself.

It's not surprising that one-off experiences fail to deliver the kind of systemic transformation and development needed for true growth, particularly when the principles taught at the workshop aren't already ingrained into the organization.

That's why the most effective leadership development opportunities have the following characteristics:

- ▶ They are **integrated** into your organization so it is evident to all employees why the program exists and who it is for.
- ▶ They are **consistent** to create momentum and mark progress, and also to demonstrate commitment and investment. It's not a "one-and-done."
- ▶ They are **customized** for your organization, with a culture champion high in the ranks of the executive team that prioritizes the investment and models effective behavior and leadership.

5 Critical Skills Your Leaders Should Develop

Let's start with essential relationship-building skills

1. Listening

Has this happened to you? You're sitting in a team meeting and someone makes a comment that you latch onto. You have to respond! So you remain focused on responding to that comment, even as the conversation continues. But as a result, you've stopped listening and missed other valuable comments from the team.

Listening is a skill that is often talked about, but not practiced (ironically). It is simple in concept, but difficult in reality.

Listening is how we access understanding. It's how we connect with others and make each other feel heard, understood, and seen. It is one of the most critical skills to fostering trust and relationships and involves far more effort than most people—and leaders—realize.

Many organizations will talk about listening and want to develop a learning culture. They want a culture of innovation with open and honest dialogue. But when they survey their team, they hear things like, "I don't feel appreciated or valued" or "They don't listen to our ideas."

Those responses are a signal that every organization must pay attention to, and a lot of it starts with learning how to listen more effectively.

2. Asking Questions

Has this happened to you? Your meetings (especially 1:1s) consist of mostly status updates. It's like reading a list of tasks. They are transactional. You ask questions, but the conversation isn't meaningful to either party. You wonder, "Is this meeting even valuable?"

Much of our work day is spent asking others for information. Yet unlike professionals (e.g. lawyers or doctors) who are taught how to ask questions as a part of their training, few business leaders think of questioning as a skill—or consider how their own answers to questions could make conversations more productive.

2. Asking Questions *continued*

That's a missed opportunity because questioning is a powerful tool for unlocking value: it sparks exchanges of ideas, it fuels learning and performance, and it builds rapport and trust among team members. It can mitigate risk by uncovering unforeseen obstacles.

Think about your sales department, where most team members have developed skills around how to build rapport with potential customers. Think about how much emphasis and feedback is placed on those specific questioning skills to improve performance.

The thought process runs parallel for leaders. For some leaders, questioning comes easily. Their natural curiosity, emotional intelligence, and ability to read people keep questions on the tip of their tongue. It is simply what they do.

But most of us don't ask enough questions, nor do we pose our questions in an effective way. This is an opportunity to maximize the potential of leaders, especially those who are following them.

The good news is that questioning is a skill. It can be deliberately practiced to improve relationships, increase curiosity, and improve accountability and results. As leaders ask more questions they also become better questioners—a virtuous cycle.

3. Presence

Has this happened to you? Your team members show up to a meeting with their laptops on and phones in their hands. Notifications and alerts, even muted, disrupt the flow. Everyone seems distracted. You wonder, “Is anyone actually focused right now?”

Few people think of building presence or being present as a skill, but it is.

Presence is tricky to define because everyone thinks about it from their own vantage point. Mindfulness, focus, and intimacy are a few versions of it that come to mind. But being ‘in the moment’ with someone, where they and you and them are in a flow together and everyone feels it, is a skill that can be developed.

There are many strategies and techniques to increase our presence. And in doing so, we foster relationships that are built on trust, safety, care, and productivity.

Let's talk about essential performance-enhancing skills

4. Giving & Receiving Feedback

Has this happened to you? You have to deliver constructive feedback but you have a pit in your stomach. You are worried about upsetting your colleague with criticism. You might hurt their feelings and they may think differently of you as a result.

Or, you enter your own performance review in a defensive posture. You expect to receive feedback that you don't agree with and think about ways to combat or overcome what you hear.

Feedback is something that we experience throughout our entire life journey. Whether it comes from family, friends, teachers, coaches, or managers, feedback is critical in professional settings **because it's a mechanism for building awareness and getting better.**



Feedback is primarily retrospective in that it refers to something that has already happened, but that doesn't mean it should be reactive. Leaders and companies have a huge opportunity to create a culture of feedback, and it can (and should be) done proactively.

Feedback includes two skill sets: the giving of feedback and the receiving of feedback.

Underneath these skills is something deeper: a human element. The truth is that we all have a personal relationship with feedback. For example, a people-pleaser might find difficulty giving constructive feedback to someone out of fear of upsetting the other person. And a sensitive person might have difficulty receiving feedback because they might view the criticism as failure.

Feedback is often perceived as a threat, but the good news is that you can navigate that perception by developing understanding and skills around feedback to make it a part of your culture. It's a matter of awareness, learning, and deliberate practice.

5. Coaching

Has this happened to you? You continue to see a repetitive pattern of behavior from a team member that is affecting their performance. You have provided some feedback, but the issue keeps resurfacing. You don't know what to do, but sense there is something deeper. You wonder, "If only I could get [name] to..."

All of the skills we've reviewed previously center around practice, improvement, and helping your team members reach potential. That is the definition of coaching, which is a skill that we can develop and practice more effectively.

Where feedback is retrospective, coaching is more forward-looking. It's about potential and growth. It's about finding what's possible and mindfully getting there.

Coaching as a skill and tool for leaders is more relevant than it has ever been. It's a huge opportunity for companies and teams to think about how to navigate the constantly changing dynamics that they're experiencing.

Said another way: This is how companies scale.

This is how high-performing teams scale. It's by learning to empower people and coaching them how to think more strategically, so they can navigate the uncertainty with a clearer direction, as opposed to just fighting the daily fire.

When you approach challenges/opportunities through coaching, you're not just tackling the issue right in front of you, you're deploying a more reflective and deeper look into the root cause and the people involved. This has an enduring impact, as opposed to a momentary one.

Coaching can happen in many forms. It doesn't have to be one-on-one. It could be a team. It could be a group of individuals from various places, companies, and walks of life. It could also just be a single conversation.

Now imagine if every player on your team was equipped to coach. What would that look like? What impact would it have on your company and team?





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Real Leaders Share the Real Impact of Leadership Development

NextGen Center has been fortunate to partner with organizations that believe in developing leaders. The CEOs and executive decision-makers engaged NextGen Center Brian Alvo to deliver practical and functional leadership training through in-house programs, 1:1 coaching, and a cohort-based course. Here's what they had to say.

“We wanted better tools for our managers to be better leaders themselves. The effect of the NextGen program was immediate. I was hoping for it to be good, and it blew away all my expectations.”



Marc Pons
CEO of
Chapel Hill Tire

Ryan Szwejbka
President
Reunion Marketing



“Our hope was to cultivate a new group of leaders in our company who would be able to raise up and lead our growing team through effective coaching and communication. People left the program with a deep understanding of their current skill level and the steps they needed to take to become a better leader. I would say that this is one of the most important long-term investments we have made as a company.”

“If you're not doing leadership development and it's not part of your recruiting and retention game plan, you're already falling behind. That's why all my managers go through this intensive management training program. It's a critical part of how we maintain our team culture and deliver on our promise of personal and professional development for all the employees they manage.”

Chris Leithe
SVP of Sales
Adwerx



Paul Garofolo
CEO of Locus Biosciences



“For CEOs who are considering providing leadership development training, I say this: you don't really have a choice. If you want your people to really contribute in any way shape or form. You have a moral obligation to invest in your people.”



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ABOUT NEXTGEN CENTER

NextGen Center is creating and sustaining a community that fosters growth, development, and transformational awareness of self for the next generation of leaders, so that they are better prepared to navigate their life-long personal and professional journeys, as well as the journeys of those whom they touch.

We believe...

- ▶ There is no cookie-cutter manual for success.
- ▶ Professional and leadership development is personal.
- ▶ Transitions from contributor to leader are often harder than they need to be.
- ▶ Emerging leaders want development opportunities, and often look to their organizations to provide it.
- ▶ Organizations believe in supporting and investing in future leaders, but often don't prioritize it.

How does NextGen Center help organizations to develop leaders from within?

- ▶ We offer team-focused workshops
- ▶ We customize in-house leadership development programs
- ▶ We deliver individual and team coaching engagements
- ▶ We host a cohort-based Foundation for Effective Leadership program
- ▶ We continue the relationship with reinforcement programs to refresh and deepen existing skills