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[EA Home Page](#)

[About Us](#)

[Strategy Support](#)

[Process Improvement Support](#)

[People Development Support](#)

[Contact Us](#)

Are You Feeding the Leader in You?

Each summer, I am blessed with the opportunity to attend a leadership conference that brings together some of our world's most renowned and respected names in organizational development and leadership. The program never fails to excite and challenge me; it also never fails to unveil aspects of my personal approach that are ripe for attention.

As I sit, rapt by the program each year, what inevitably brings a smile to my face is the number of times a speaker will take his or her place and enthusiastically weave in something that was said by the people on stage earlier. It's not uncommon for an instructor to acknowledge and engage with another person who was, or soon will be, on stage. These folks -- icons in their fields -- are not just coming to teach; they're coming to **learn**! They're sharing, but they're also soaking in. They're present to feed as well as to receive.

Contrast that with some of the participants who were in attendance around me. I saw people tip out, remain in the anteroom chatting, make their way to the perimeter of the building attached to electronic devices, or completely miss pre- or post-lunch sessions in exchange for an extended break. Surely they picked up nuggets and likely were glad they came; yet, for some, the hunger seemed to be absent.

I wonder. Into which group do YOU fall? Are you actively and passionately feeding the leader in you? As you can imagine, there certainly are benefits to you in doing so. Even more, the body you lead also stands to reap rewards.

So, join me for this month's edition of EA Insights. Let's go beyond the warm-and-fuzzies and look at some of the business reasons why feeding the leader in you makes sense. I hope that, if not already, you soon will be HUNGRY!

All the best,

June

June Melvin Mickens
Executive Advantage, LLC

Quotes

"Learning is not attained by chance; it must be sought for with ardor and diligence."

~Abigail Adams

"Success in management requires learning as fast as the world is changing."

~Warren Bennis

"Develop a passion for learning. If you do, you will never cease to grow."

~Anthony J. D'Angelo

"Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young."

~Henry Ford

"One of the most important actions, things a leader can do, is to lead by example."

"If you want everyone else to be passionate, committed, dedicated, and motivated, you go first!"

~Marshall Goldsmith

"I like to listen. I have learned a great deal from listening carefully."

~Ernest Hemingway

"As a leader, you won't always have all of the answers - - no one expects



Learning Leaders Are Good for Business

June Melvin Mickens

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Right now, I'm racking my brain. I cannot think of a single organizational leader who would tell me that he or she does not see the benefit of ongoing learning. That's a good thing! It shows that we all hold continuous development as dear...at least in theory. However, something often gets lost in moving from belief to action. And, unfortunately, far too often the source of the disconnect is the commitment to learning that the leader has for him- or herself.

Now, I hear the pushback arguments already beginning to take shape in your mind or mouth -- busyness, program fit, logistics challenges, and the list could go on. These all may be valid hindrances, but I would offer that there are business reasons for prioritizing learning that make it important to find ways to overcome the thorniest of obstacles.

Let me offer three business reasons why nonstop learning makes sense for leaders and then three recommendations for how to weave learning into your schedule...yes, even one that's tighter than tight.

Why Keep Learning?

We live in a rapidly changing world. Updates or developments in technology, organizational theory, law, industry-centric areas, and more mean that there constantly is something to learn. So, if a leader is to maintain a current knowledge base in order to guide his or her organization credibly, to be a resource or meaningful sounding board for team members, then your learning cannot cease.

Learning positions you and your company for competitive advantage. Imagine the long-term sustainability of a company whose leader found her groove back in 1995, or 2005, or even 2015 and is very comfortable not to have anyone muddy the water with new ideas or approaches. ("By golly, if it ain't broke, don't fix it...thank you very much.") Even if doing well at the moment, how long will that success last? How effective is that mindset to attract and/or retain people in today's talent pool in order to keep the business operating? How marketable is this leader if transition one day is in the cards?

A leader's continued learning improves the competitive advantage of both that leader and the organization. While change doesn't have to follow from each new thing learned, it does broaden one's awareness of the possibilities. It positions you -- the leader -- to address customer needs in a better manner because you're more attuned to the options available for working with that customer. A learning environment, with you ensconced as chief learner, heightens your ability to interest and keep talent that's inquisitive, growing, and willing to inject the entity with curiosity and fresh ideas so you can do the work you do in an ever-changing world. The business, you, the team, and your customers benefit.

Your team is watching. There's nothing more frustrating than a leader who touts learning...for others. That's a leader who behaves as if he's reached his learning cap. It's a classic "Do as I say do; not as I do" scenario.

Well, it's also a poor leadership model. By functioning in this way, you send the message that learning is fine for some -- some positions, some people, some levels -- but not for all. You frustrate those who continue to learn, are excited by what they glean, but return to work only to find no place for practical application, and soon grow weary of wasting time and either leave or adopt your non-learning attitude.

You see, you set the tone for learning as the leader. People are watching. They are modeling themselves after you, or they refuse to give up on learning and simply are biding their time until they can move on to a place where learning is valued in both word and action.

How can I fit learning in?

Understandably, a leader's schedule can make attempts to engage in ongoing learning daunting. However, sometimes we focus on huge approaches and miss some of the less time-consuming steps that

you to -- so you must be open to listening and learning from others."

~Marilyn Hewson

"One secret of leadership is that the mind of a leader never turns off. Leaders even when they are sightseers or spectators, are active; not passive observers."

~James Humes

"Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose."

~Zora Neale Hurston

"Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."

~John F. Kennedy

"The beautiful thing about learning is nobody can take it away from you."

~B. B. King

"There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education.

The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning."

~Jiddu Krishnamurti

"The quality of a leader is reflected in the standards they set for themselves."

~Ray Kroc

"The books that help you most are those which make you think that most."

~Pablo Neruda

"Learning and innovation go hand in hand.

The arrogance of success is to think that what you did yesterday will be sufficient for tomorrow."

~William Pollard

"Never become so much of an expert that you stop

can have just as significant an impact. Education need not always entail traditional learning opportunities; it can take place in a range of ways.

Pause once a month for introspection. Carving out a bit of time, perhaps once a month, to look back objectively at the period that just ended can be invaluable. It also doesn't make a huge dent in most calendars. When you stop and look within, pull out what went well, think about what still needs to happen, and analyze what you'd do differently in the future. Such an exercise, when undertaken earnestly, can be powerful for personal and leadership development.

Identify, and set appointments with, wise counsel. Sometimes blind spots prevent us from seeing ourselves and our situations clearly. For that reason, it also is helpful to get feedback from trusted counsel. A first place to solicit input is from the team you lead. The folks around you, if given the freedom to speak openly, can help you to see yourself and the environment from a different perspective. This can be critical information to bring to the table as you pause for the type of introspection noted above.

Also, (and this is not a shameless plug) connecting with a coach can be extremely useful. In a coaching relationship, you gain the expertise and insight of someone who is independent from your organization but who is committed to your development and success. Your coach has the ability not just to help you analyze situations but then to work with you to create strategies for addressing those highlighted matters and to serve as a consistent and impartial sounding board as you assess and tweak your approach along the way.

Commit to at least one learning opportunity a quarter. There are a range of formal and informal "traditional" learning opportunities you can pursue. Books, magazine, and articles (like this one) -- whether hard-copy or electronic -- are readily available on just about any topic of interest. Free and subscription online videos are no more than a few clicks away if you're a visual learner. In-depth courses are offered in live and computer-based formats. The wealth of options that exist today make it easier than ever to undertake at least one learning opportunity per quarter that will fit your substantive need and schedule.

So, don't stop learning...you and the organization you lead have much to gain!

If you could use some help weaving learning into the life of your organization or your own, we're here to help. Reach out to us at **Executive Advantage**. We're here to assist you as you target your team and individual learning efforts. Contact us today.

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*gaining expertise.
View life as a
continuous learning
experience."*

~**Denis Waitley**

*"An organization's
ability to learn, and
translate that
learning into action
rapidly, is the
ultimate
competitive
advantage."*

~**Jack Welch**

About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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