

How the Industry is Handling Leadership Development

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I speak with my equals and we can't figure out how things are going to be when we leave our positions.

The above sentence was uttered by a 60-something attendee during a PDH webinar I recently gave for CMAA. Our topic was the leadership development necessary for 2022 and beyond. Many of those in attendance expressed concern with the lack of preparation up-and-coming leaders in the industry are receiving, and their concerns are warranted.

As part of my work, I continually interview AEC firms, from private/regional firms to public/global firms – asking them how they are going about preparing the future leaders of their organization. This research has been ongoing for about a year now, and the data doesn't paint a confidence inducing picture.

When I interview firm representatives (generally a CEO or COO but sometimes HR and in very rare cases a person who holds the title of leadership development manager or the like) I ask the same five questions:

1. Are you doing leadership development?
2. If yes, who is receiving it?
3. What are you teaching?
4. How are you teaching it?
5. How much money are you spending on leadership development?

Here are the general responses I am getting. I say "general"



because there are some outliers who are truly making leadership development a priority for their firm, but for the most part I am hearing the same answers over and over.

ARE YOU DOING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT?

No. Not only are AEC firms rarely doing leadership development, it isn't even in their five-year plans.

IF YES, WHO IS RECEIVING IT?

Across the board the only group receiving leadership development are people who are currently front-line managers. In other words, people with direct reports. What's interesting is that the general theme is that these folks aren't expected to be the next generation of senior leaders, the intention is to get

them prepared to bring up the next generation of leaders. It's a trickle-down strategy, if you will.

WHAT ARE YOU TEACHING?

The two most common responses are communication and/or team-management skills such as coaching, empathy, collaboration, etc.


HOW ARE YOU TEACHING IT?

This response is pretty evenly split – and it's an either/or choice. Companies are either using in-house talent (executives/managers who used to be in the field) or vendors (including platforms like LinkedIn Learning, consultants, and local universities).

FINALLY, HOW MUCH MONEY ARE YOU SPENDING ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT?

Because so few companies are doing it, the aggregate answer is: zero.

As an outlier example however, one global company I spoke with had spent \$1 million putting all their front-line managers through a seven-session communications course in 2021.

Because the pandemic has caused so many Boomers and GenXers to accelerate their retirement plans, it is imperative that companies put “leadership development” at the top of their urgent and important lists. The ramifications of having younger generations ascend to leadership roles they have not been prepared for are staggering – especially in an industry with a high need for both safety and efficiency. 



About the Author

Dr. Nanette Miner is a leadership development and workplace-learning strategy consultant. Through her firm, [The Training Doctor](#), she has revolutionized the way that individuals are prepared for leadership roles in their organizations. Rather than a chosen few, her process is aimed at ensuring everyone in the company has the skills and business acumen of a leader. This approach ensures both immediate and long-term return-on-investment (ROI) for an organization.

She has written articles for Chief Learning Office magazine, Forbes, and MBA World and is a frequent guest on workplace training and career podcasts and talk radio such as Inc. Radio and America's Workforce Radio.

Nanette regularly speaks at industry conferences and corporate learning events on how to integrate leadership capabilities throughout an organization. An author of eight books, her most recent is Future-Proofing Your Organization.

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