



How to tell the boss he needs some training

A guide to designing and selling executive level learning & development.

Executive level development can be a bit of a touchy topic in some UK businesses, you can see the areas that need polishing but no one is prepared to suggest they get the duster out! At least that's the case some of the time. In an alternative scenario the suggested development need is highlighted to the individual but it falls on deaf ears.

One of the clear problems in the mind of the exec is that they have already attained, they have reached a level of respect and seniority worthy of their life experience and achievements. This is of course true, most executives are competent individuals, they have had to be to get the role, and they often have to continue to be to retain the role. So the thought of sitting through any type of learning intervention that does little more than tickle the memory becomes highly unappetising to someone with such experience.

At the same time most execs worth their salt recognise that the learning's not yet over, and the right intervention could help them hone existing skills and competencies, introduce new thinking and provide independent comment on some home truths.

The key therefore is all in the solution design and delivery. We've pulled together five key elements of creating a genuinely enhancing learning intervention for big bosses.

Continued...



Carry out a quick brainstorm: Why do well intentioned leaders often struggle to embrace L&D interventions for themselves?



1

Busy

Recognise that time is a very very precious commodity

Busy? We all feel it, but multiply it several times over to get a feel for an executives perspective. They will need huge flexibility of engagement, and they will want a large amount of bespoke design to fit their individual timetables, and learning preferences. It will be very rare that they have the luxury of separating out dedicated time to commit to a learning initiative, the solution will have to work around them, not the other way around.

2

Opportunistic

Know that benefits have got to be very tangible

These individuals will often be discussing the return on investment expected as a result of their decisions and actions. This idea will permeate everything they do, especially investment of their own resources and energy. It is vital that they are clear about the potential gains they will achieve from an intervention, and it is imperative that tangible wins are evident as early as possible in the engagement. Executives will not welcome having to contribute to many sessions if they do not start to see real value being delivered.

3

Specialised

Get very very specific about the need

For an executive program to be a success it's got to be very focused. A pointed needs analysis must be undertaken to ensure that they get what's required from the engagement. We think open performance coaching has a part to play, but much rather establish stronger, clearer outcomes before designing and commencing the intervention. It's time to forget the waffle and get very black and white as to what will be achieved by the programme. Insightful preference based learning systems such as iAspire and other profile tools offer an ideal way of getting a deep understanding of the individuals learning needs.

4

Seasoned

Engage like minds

The selection of the learning facilitator is always important, but none more so than when engaging in executive development. Take time to find facilitators that fit the executives style, approach and seniority. They will have to earn the respect of these seasoned executives by demonstrating competence and insight on top of their coaching and facilitation skills, so finding the right provider is make or break.

Ideas, factors and constraints to make your intervention a success

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Careful preparation taking all four 'BOSS' areas into consideration will provide a strong foundation from which you can engage and build your senior execs skills, capabilities and behaviours.

It doesn't matter whether you are helping professionals to focus on alignment and corporate culture, develop expectations, manage conflict, establish trust and credibility, enhance retention and focus on goals...

a robust approach will vastly increase your potential of success.

5 **Finally make sure you measure changes in performance.** Course effectiveness assessment should be the starting point of any training intervention development. Think about what this does; Suddenly the focus is on outcomes, you will understand what success will look like, and how you know whether you've been successful. You will design everything focusing on the common goal of bringing about genuine return from the training budget, and there will be a direct correlation between the assessment process and the learning content.

Training that does not lead to a behavioural change is at best therapeutic, but most often a complete waste of budget. So when you are engaging your trainer, expect them to articulate how they will bring about a return for the investment that you are making. Expect them to have thought through mechanisms and processes for assessing and evaluating the contribution to learning. After all, they should be the experts at this. Watch out for training providers that want to focus all the attention on their wonderfully designed solution, but have to be prompted to talk about the any form of assessment.



Keeping these simple principles in mind throughout the creation and delivery of your executive development programmes will vastly increase the potential of true engagement from these busy people. With careful planning your bosses will be asking for the next programme, before you've even mentioned it.

