

## **“A Baker’s Dozen of Things That Are Increasingly Self-evident About Executive Development”**

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1. Executive Development is a strategy to help organizations achieve their objectives and face their increasingly changing and often uncertain futures. To be effective it must be a continuous process, long-term, flexible and integrated both within the organization’s culture and challenges and the larger context of vastly changing world realities.
2. Executive Development has often been more focused on technical demands, operations, functions, or the management side of executive responsibility, and less on such leadership imperatives as change, adaptability, alignment and human capacity building. While the importance of both the manager and leader roles is understood, the focus and purpose of development efforts often are confused.
3. Understanding, support, and initiative from the “top leadership” of an organization can provide powerful assets in creating and sustaining an executive development effort. This may mean educating, persuading, and engaging those “top” leaders in the process of creating the framework and assumptions that support our development interventions.
4. Leadership and executive functioning is multidimensional and can be approached from numerous perspectives but development programs must have clarity of purpose, underlying assumptions and principles that define appropriate content and structure. They provide the glue that weaves and reinforces the components of whatever we do.
5. Development programs are most effective when they are experience-based, i.e., taking into account what executives bring to the development process, and experiential in format, i.e., involving executives in relevant and engaging activities. “...development does not mean taking people *away from* their work. It means helping them *learn from* their work.” (Center for Creative Leadership Handbook on Leadership Development, 2003).
6. Executive and/or leadership development is a business, an industry, a profession. Resources have expanded exponentially, gurus abound, costs have soared, and expertise has become more sophisticated. Opportunities are rich. *Caveat emptor.*

7. Excellent work in executive development often loses significant impact because of the lack of follow-up activities, reinforcement of learning and application in organizational settings. Evaluating programs is not the same as knowing what executives are doing and with what effect “back home” and how we can support their continued learning. Otherwise, “life changing events” become events not changes.
8. The essence of executive development is self-awareness and the subsequent individual planning for action and changes that will have positive outcomes on the organizational setting. It has, therefore, a highly personal, individualized dimension that is best served through multi-faceted feedback mechanisms or assessments and the guidance of professionals skilled in both interpretation and integration. The latter becomes increasingly important as we encourage and welcome diversity in the executive ranks.
9. Learning is a critical factor in executive success and in development processes. We must pay attention not only to openness and willingness to learn but how people learn. There are significant differences among people in the ways they absorb information, approach problems, even accept learning as an element of executive responsibility.
10. Coaching and mentoring have become significant components of executive development programs because they offer opportunities for continuous learning, application of feedback interpretations, focus on current and real situations, and appropriate challenges to limited or one-way approaches to problems. What each is and has to offer differs widely.
11. The concept of executive development is not embraced fully or enthusiastically by organizations, especially by the very people who could be the champions, models or benefactors of such efforts. Development is often seen as peripheral, a luxury, unnecessary. “The available technologies for training, selection, succession planning, assessment and other activities related in some way to executive development are quite sophisticated but the **undoing of development lies in its perceived noncentrality**...When viewed as a ‘human resource program that’s nice to have’ the most refined executive development program is a budget item waiting to be cut.” (Morgan McCall, High Flyers: Developing the Next Generation of Leaders, 1998.
12. Research, stories, and executive transparency have enabled us to understand more about why executives derail, or do not succeed as expected. Chief among those factors are interpersonal relationships. We know as well that we are not simply adding skills to executives who have “made it” but are dealing with the whole person and must engage each person through the many facets of their lives, and the many dimensions of their personalities.

13. “Practicing what we preach” is extremely difficult. Like the executives we focus on, we are human and hold values and opinions that are “dear” to us. Transparency is difficult when we are measured and accountable to so many different audiences. The sheer volume of resources to absorb about development and emerging perspectives is overwhelming. Keeping up with a burgeoning literature, changing players in the field, or simply the realities of the organizations we serve is time and energy consuming. Inertia or outsourcing are often easier than confronting the enormous demands for making things more relevant, current, or creative. Yet “the longer we dwell on our misfortunes the greater is their power to harm us.” (Voltaire) Indeed, *carpe diem*.

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