

JUICY WORK NEWS

Updates from The Learning Advantage

March 2019



THE Learning Advantage

Mobley's Musings – No One Wins the Blame Game

All too often I find that when a problem occurs, organizations believe they've solved the problem once they've found someone to blame and perhaps fire. Of course, the problem hasn't really been solved and when it occurs again, someone else is fired. An open and honest discussion about what caused the problem and how to fix it never takes place. With the blame-and-fire pattern firmly established, people are even less likely to point out problems, and they're certainly not motivated to fix them, fearing they might too be fired if their efforts fail.

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) offers a prime example. For years, a stream of general managers warned WMATA's board about safety and maintenance issues in D.C.'s Metro subway system. They sought additional funding to address the problems as well as the board's support for reducing operational hours so workers could perform repairs. Time and again, the board denied the requests. When a fatal accident occurred, the board's reaction—hire a new manager—did nothing to address the problem.

It wasn't until Paul Wiedefeld was hired that the maintenance problems began to be dealt with. Wiedefeld told the board that to solve the problems he needed their support to do difficult things like reducing service, raising prices, and investing in maintenance. Safety must come first, he told board members, even though that meant inconvenience and increased costs.

Leaders can encourage their staff to look for root causes and find lasting solutions if they see mistakes as opportunities to learn rather than hunt for someone to blame. When General Electric CEO Jack Welch learned one of his managers had made a costly mistake, he was asked if he intended to fire the executive. "Absolutely not," he replied. "We just spent a lot of money educating him."

When something goes wrong, an environment that emphasizes problem-solving rather than blaming will go a long way to ensuring errors are not repeated and that learning is shared broadly in your organization.

Sandy



Sandy Mobley

Ask Sandy: Invest in Yourself

When people become busy at work and at home, things they used to enjoy often fall by the wayside. My client noticed that he wasn't exercising like he had in the past and wasn't feeling as peppy. So, he made a commitment to himself to make time for exercise and found it gave him more energy. He shared this anecdote with his team and encouraged them to make similar commitments to invest in themselves. Exercise is just one form of investment, he told them. Taking time to reflect, learning new skills, and seeking the assistance of a professional coach had also proved to be worthwhile investments for him.

Just as organizations can't grow without investment, neither can people. Doing the same things, the same way can cause us to become stale. One organization I worked with created learning teams and let people learn whatever they were interested in even if it wasn't work related. They found that learning something new—no matter what it is—can spark curiosity that carries over to the desire to learn on the job.

Working with a coach or a trainer can help you improve your skills and identify opportunities to grow. An outside expert can offer a new perspective on what you do and how you do it and point out blind spots that are keeping you from achieving your goals. Traditional performance development tools like formal and informal feedback and 360-degree assessments can also help you understand your strengths as well as behaviors that might be diminishing your effectiveness.

Get in the habit of investing in yourself. When I started my company, I continued to go to conferences and attend development programs to make sure I wasn't getting stale. Don't wait for your organization to set up a development program for you; submit requests for what you need and if your organization won't pay for it, do it anyway.

Learning for Leaders – Ask yourself what investments in yourself would have a good payoff.

Coaches Corner – Remind clients of things they can do to learn and grow. Their commitment to self-investment will set a good example for their staff.

If you have questions you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to sandy@learningadvantageinc.com



Becoming the Architect of Your Career

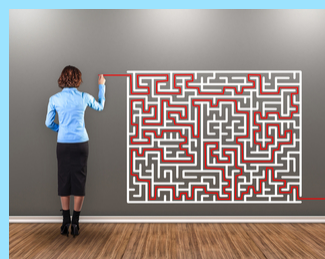
After earning an undergraduate degree in mathematics I pursued a career in systems engineering. I found the work enjoyable enough but realized that a sizable part of my brain wasn't fully engaged in it. So I went to business school to find my next career. At the end of the first year, I decided organizational development (OD) and leadership would be a good fit for me. To make sure, I took every class offered on the topics, did pro bono projects in the field, and spent the summer between semesters doing OD work at a tech company.

When I interviewed at Hewlett Packard, a manager told me, "We don't have a career ladder here; we have a career maze. That means there's no pre-defined career path so you'll be able to design your career." I wasn't sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing. A B-school friend had joined IBM where her next five career moves were clearly mapped out for her. She liked knowing the next steps, but I wasn't convinced. What if the direction laid out for her took her somewhere she didn't want to be?

I found HP's maze more to my liking. While it offered more opportunity it also required that I take the initiative in plotting my career. After several years, my HP colleagues in leadership development had taken their careers down different paths. One took a marketing job with HP's printer division in San Diego. Another went into manufacturing in HP's fiber optics division where she eventually became general manager. Another colleague continued in training, and I took my career in a direction that eventually led to coaching.

Be the Architect

Choosing to be the architect of your own career rather than following a structured path means you will have more many decisions to make along the way and, at times, precious little guidance. When my client Gayle, a vice president with a financial services company, was presented with options to remain a subject matter expert or move into management, she hesitated. She liked the technical part of her job and having the opportunity to go deeper in that area or go broader and learn about adjacent areas. Or she could step into a management position, a path that would lead her away from doing the work and toward managing the work and the staff. [Read more.](#)



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