

Kenexa HR Thought Leadership®: Leadership Development

HOST: Welcome to the Kenexa HR Thought Leadership Podcast series. This series was created to educate, inspire, and fuel the evolution of leadership in our organizations, our communities, and our world.

I'm your host Jace Bonsall.

In today's episode, we will listen to a discussion entitled "Leadership Development" by Dr. Tommy Weir. Dr. Weir serves as Managing Director of Kenexa Leadership Solutions, specializing in strategic leadership development for fast growth and emerging markets.

Leadership Development is an area that many organizations invest a large amount of money in, particularly in the areas of training, classes and workshops. There may be better approaches, however to developing our leaders, Dr. Weir delivers ideas and insights on how organizations can better develop leaders through deliberate practice and accountability. Asking the questions such as "why did you make that decision, or how could you have done it differently?"

DR. WEIR: I'm regularly asked by organizations, "why do we invest so much money in leadership development, yet we're not getting the quality of leader we're looking for?" If you're asking that question, maybe there are some things that you want to stop and take a look at. And it really comes down to what type of leadership development activities are you doing?

A few years back I had a really cool job and had the opportunity to, um, to really just kind of work with some world leaders. And one of them that came through was Malcolm Gladwell. And I had the chance to ask him—I said, "Malcolm, what do you think it takes to really grow a leader?" And he paused and he gave a very incredible insight into it. He said, "Becoming a leader is a lot like becoming a doctor. It's something that you actually cannot learn in the classroom." As I thought about it, I thought, this is interesting because the area that we spend the most money in leadership development is training, workshops, master classes, yet we know it's the area that has the least amount of impact.

And as I listened to him and he started talking about this, I thought this was fascinating, the fact that here we are, we have doctors that go through the classroom aspect, but yet they don't actually become doctors until they go through a period of what we would call residency or in other words, if we were using it in a sports analogy, a period of deliberate practice. So here they are, they've learned quite a bit then they go work under the guidance of a supervising physician in learning how to actually become a great doctor.

And there's something fantastic they do in the teaching hospitals. They have what's called a no-fault meeting. Now obviously if I am a doctor and I do something wrong, I'm well aware of it, the patient's well aware of it, their family's well aware of it, and the insurance company's well aware of it. So the no-fault meeting, they're not walking into it to find out what you did wrong and to point blame. They're walking to come in to help you understand why you did it and what you should have done and then what you could do to correct it. So it goes something like this. On a Friday, all of the resident students would come into a room, the attending physicians or the supervising/teaching physicians would come in and they would stop and they would point to each doctor and they would say, Dr. John, this week you removed a spleen when you were supposed to take out a liver. And everybody in the room already knows that so they're not pointing their fingers, they're not pushing blame right there. And then they would stop and say, "Why did you do that?" Fantastic question, why did you react the way that you reacted? And the next question they would say is, "What should you have done, and then what could you have done to repair it or to fix it?" Obviously in the case of the spleen or the liver, there's very little you can do at that point. But in the big picture of this, they're asking fantastic questions.

Can you just imagine this; If we were able to take leaders who were trying to grow, were trying to develop their capabilities, so we identify the areas that they need to become better at, and then we have no-fault meetings. So we're kind of checking the egos at the door, walking in the room and we can sit back down and we can turn to a manager, and we can say, Michael or Ann or whoever the manager is, we could say, this past week you really jumped down these employees. Your communication was tremendously ineffective. Why did you react

that way? Why did you speak this way? Now can you imagine just simply having them pause for a few moments and actually think about what they did, the difference that would make. And then you could say, what should you have done? You see the issue is that managers and leaders and organizations are not dumb people. OK we put them there. They're sharp; they're bright. What they need to do is just help on building the skill, getting it better and better and better. And it's not about the classroom, it's not about the technical aspects, it's about the aspect of practice.

And I find this dynamic of practice very fascinating because I play a little bit of golf. My handicap is pretty poor. It's between 25 and 27, depending upon what year it is. And I think it's fascinating that I go and I practice with how to coach and I have a 25, 27 handicap, yet Tiger Woods goes and practices with a coach. And then when we look at our practice, what I do is I tend to go to the driving range, I tend to take out my driver, which is the club I hit the best, and I hit it over and over and over to watch that nice, pretty shot going on out. Am I practicing? Am I really practicing becoming a better golfer? No. If I were practicing, I'd be on the putting green with my putter trying to improve the worst part of my game, trying to improve the part that is actually keeping me from improving my handicap. But I don't do that. I practice the one part I like. Yeah, when Tiger Woods goes out to practice, he takes a coach with him. He goes to the sand trap, drops his ball, steps on the ball, and then hits the ball out of the trap. And he hits his difficult shots, standing there and working with the coach.

Now if we think about this picture, most of us when we become leaders, are in the aspect of developing as leaders or organizations when we try to develop leaders, we're a lot more like Tommy Weir. We go out and we focus on the things that we do well and we try to do them over and over. And then we say, yeah, we're practicing. We're doing things to become better. Or we're like doctors, only doing the classroom part of it. So we go to this program, we go to this class and we set this forward and say, hey, if you learn these things, you'll be a better leader. But if you notice on the other side of this equation, we have Tiger Woods who goes out and practices with a coach on the difficult aspects, not just the difficult aspects, but the aspects that would make him a better champion. Or we could look at the doctor analogy and we walk out and we take what we learn in the classroom and we put it into practice, the idea of becoming a leader, how to become a leader, how do you improve, going back to that original question, how do you improve your investment in leadership development? It's very simple. It comes down to the idea, to the concept of deliberate practice. If you as an organization or you as a leader want to get better, you need to focus on deliberate practice. And deliberate practice means identifying areas that will make you better and then focusing with help, with support, with not necessarily a coach, but maybe a manager, maybe a friend, maybe a colleague, supporting you, encouraging you, holding you accountable in those areas. I mean if we were to take 360 Feedback and it's very common for organizations to help the individual set up a development plan coming out of a multi-rater. But how often do we actually give that and the accountability of it to the line manager, who can actually focus on the practice dynamic and encouraging the practice? So really if you want to become a better leader, it comes down to the simple idea of deliberate practice. If you will focus on practicing, you will become and you will develop the quality of leaders that you're desiring to have.

HOST: *Thank you for joining us today for the Kenexa HR Thought Leadership Podcast series, where we seek to educate, inspire, and fuel the evolution of leadership in our organizations, our communities, and our world. If you have questions regarding today's episode, please feel free to email tommy.weir@kenexa.com. We also invite you to visit our website at Kenexapods.com to find the original transcripts of this episode, that's K-E-N-E-X-A pods.com. This episode was brought to you by Kenexa, a leader in multiplying business success for organizations worldwide.*

Copyright Kenexa®, 2009. All rights reserved.

No quotes from the materials contained herein may be used in any media without attribution to the author. This transcript may not be reproduced in whole or in part without prior written permission. For further information, please contact Andrea Watkins at andrea.watkins@kenexa.com.