STYLE · JUDGMENT

The Value of Leadership Training

Jim Petersen, PhD · November 15, 2026

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From readiness to measurable results

> *Every organization has a strategy, whether it is written down or not. But a strategy cannot coach an employee, earn a team's trust, make a difficult decision, or guide people through change. Those responsibilities fall to leaders. When organizations leave leadership development to chance, they place both their people and their strategy at risk.*

The case for leadership training is not simply that leaders should take more classes. It is that leadership is a set of capabilities that can be developed, practiced, supported, and evaluated. Recent Gallup and DDI findings reveal the scale of the readiness problem; a large meta-analysis and program-level research show why well-designed development can make a difference. The question for executives is whether their investment changes what leaders actually do. [1–6]

The evidence: an expensive readiness gap

- **88%** of HR professionals surveyed by DDI lack confidence in their leadership pipeline. [1]
- **44%** of managers worldwide had ever received management training, according to Gallup's 2025 findings. [3]
- **17%** of leaders surveyed by DDI feel confident anticipating and reacting to change. [2]

Source populations and questions differ; these statistics describe a readiness problem, not the causal impact of any particular training program.

These numbers tell a consistent story. Organizations rely on a leadership bench that many HR professionals do not trust, and many managers enter the role without formal preparation. At the same time, the demands on leaders are increasing, especially in change, communication, and judgment. Promoting a strong individual contributor without developing people-leadership skills does not solve this problem; it transfers the risk to a larger team.

Preparation should therefore begin before a promotion. High-potential employees need opportunities to practice setting direction, giving feedback, resolving conflict, leading through uncertainty, and taking responsibility for results. A job title can authorize decisions; it cannot create the judgment or trust required to make them well.

Why better leadership has business value

1. Leadership shapes the employee experience

Gallup reports that just 20% of employees globally were engaged in 2025. Manager engagement was 22%, down from 31% in 2022. Gallup also attributes at least 70% of the variance in team engagement to the manager. That is a statement about differences among teams, not a claim that leaders cause 70% of all business outcomes. [4, 8]

Managers translate priorities into work, explain decisions, recognize effort, coach performance, and address problems early. When they lack those capabilities, employees experience the organization through uncertainty and inconsistency. Effective training helps a manager move from supervising tasks to developing people. That training must still be supported by realistic workloads, clear authority, and organizational systems that reinforce good leadership.

2. Development can improve learning, behavior, and results

The evidence for training is more direct than the general engagement statistics. In a 2017 meta-analysis of 335 independent samples, Lacerenza and colleagues found positive effects of leadership training on learning, transfer of training to the job, and organizational results. The reported effect size for results was ;B Ò ãs#° that is a standardized statistical effect, not a 72% improvement in profits or performance. The strongest programs used a needs analysis, feedback, multiple delivery methods (especially practice), and spaced sessions. [5]

Gallup's research on its strengths-based manager-development programs offers a practical example: compared with peer managers, participants' teams showed up to 18% higher engagement and 21% to 28% lower employee turnover. These are findings from particular programs and comparison groups; they should not be presented as guaranteed results from all leadership courses, or as proof of any one provider's results. [3]

3. Leadership depth protects execution and succession

A strategy depends on leaders who can execute it through other people. A strong bench allows an organization to fill critical roles without repeatedly starting over. DDI found that organizations with proactive, future-oriented HR teams were three times as likely as reactive teams to report a strong leadership bench. DDI also reported that strong development programs can help organizations fill 39% more critical leadership roles with internal candidates. These relationships are promising, though observational. [7, 9]

The value is not limited to a promotion event. Prepared leaders create continuity during departures, expansions, reorganizations, and unexpected disruption. Their impact can show up in the speed of execution, the quality of decisions, lower avoidable turnover, and a culture where capable people want to contribute.

A lesson from the field

I learned the value of training early in my financial services career. As a new District Advisor, I took over the district that ranked last in my Region. We rebuilt it by recruiting and training advisors, and then by letting those advisors teach the training to the people who came after them. The district rose to second in the Region. The company's President then asked me to lead training for the entire company from the Home Office, a role I held for three years.

The lesson stayed with me: training worked best when the people we developed became the people who developed others. That is when training stops being an event and becomes a system for building leaders.

What kind of leadership training creates value?

Simply sending someone to a seminar is not a leadership-development strategy. DDI's November 2026 findings illustrate the gap: 68% of HR professionals believe development improves leadership capabilities, yet only 51% say their programs provide evidence of overall effectiveness. Only about one in four leaders describes their manager as an effective coach. The solution is not more training hours; it is better design and more disciplined follow-through. [6, 7]

- **Diagnose the real need.** Assess leadership strengths, role requirements, team feedback, and strategic gaps before prescribing a curriculum.
- **Teach skills that leaders must use.** Develop judgment, listening, difficult conversations, coaching, accountability, strategy, and change leadership, not just familiarity with models.
- **Make practice central.** Use realistic cases, role-plays, peer feedback, and decisions tied to the participant's actual responsibilities.
- **Space and reinforce learning.** Combine formal sessions with guided application, manager support, coaching, and follow-up; revisit behavior after the course ends.
- **Connect learning to business priorities.** Require an application plan that connects leadership behaviors to objectives, milestones, and team outcomes.
- **Measure whether behavior changes.** Look for observable decisions, communication habits, coaching effectiveness, and team results, not attendance or satisfaction alone.

Leadership draws on three complementary capacities: intellectual capability (IQ) to understand the problem, emotional intelligence (EQ) to understand and influence people, and adaptability (AQ) to respond effectively when circumstances change. Knowledge without relationships often fails in execution; good intentions without judgment fail in decision-making; and a plan without adaptability fails when conditions shift. A comprehensive program develops all three.

From the classroom to the business: a practical model

The Certified Professional Business Leader (CPBL) program of the Professional Business Coaches Alliance provides one example of a structured, application-oriented approach. It is built on the seven elements of the Petersen Leadership Model: Character, Style, Judgment, Culture, Execution, Life, and Legacy. Its three eight-week courses, CPBL 401: Leadership, CPBL 402: Strategy, and CPBL 403: Leadershift, move from people leadership and judgment to strategic direction and adaptive execution. The program uses “Pracademics”: the integration of academic insight and practitioner experience.

A central feature is the Business Transformation Plan (BTP), developed across the courses: Values and Mission in 401, Vision and Strategy in 402, and Objectives and a Tactical Action Plan in 403. Participants present the completed plan to a mentor. This matters because a leader should leave development with more than vocabulary; the leader should leave with a clearer business direction, decisions to make, people to engage, and commitments that can be reviewed. For organizations that prefer an intensive format, the five-day Lead With Purpose program builds the same six-part plan in a single week.

The external Gallup, DDI, and academic findings support investment in thoughtfully designed leadership development generally. They do not establish quantified CPBL-specific outcomes. A strong CPBL business case should be complemented by participant and employer data on readiness, applied behaviors, BTP execution, and subsequent organizational results.

How an organization can prove the return

The value of leadership training should be tested, not assumed. Before training, executives and program sponsors should agree on the few changes that matter most, capture a baseline, and decide when to assess progress. DDI identifies assessment, personalization, manager support, and strategic alignment as important characteristics of programs whose effectiveness can be demonstrated. [7]

Value dimension	Baseline question	Evidence after development
Leader readiness	Which roles have a ready-now successor?	Readiness ratings, internal-fill capacity, observed role simulations
Leader behavior	How do leaders coach and communicate now?	Manager and team feedback; documented coaching and decision practices
Team outcomes	What are engagement and retention today?	Change in engagement, regrettable turnover, first-year manager retention

Business execution	Which strategy milestones are slipping?	BTP completion, milestone attainment, cycle time, customer or quality results

Compare results at sensible intervals, such as before training, 90 days later, and again after six or twelve months. Where practical, compare similar trained and untrained groups, document other organizational changes, and include the full cost of training and time away from work. An ROI claim should count only benefits reasonably attributable to development, not every positive result that happened afterward.

> *A useful executive question is: "What are our leaders doing differently, and what evidence shows that those differences are helping our people and our business?" If that question cannot be answered, the evaluation process, not necessarily the training itself, needs improvement.*

Conclusion: make leadership readiness intentional

The latest evidence supports a compelling, but disciplined, case for leadership training. Too few managers receive preparation, many organizations lack confidence in their succession bench, and too few leaders feel ready for change. At the same time, rigorous research shows that leadership development can improve learning, on-the-job behavior, and results when it is appropriately designed and reinforced.

Organizations should stop treating leadership as a reward for prior performance and start treating it as a responsibility that deserves preparation. Invest before the promotion, develop the whole leader, connect training to real work, reinforce it through coaching, and measure what changes. That is how leadership training becomes more than an expense: it becomes an investment in people, culture, continuity, and performance.

Sources and research notes

1. DDI. Global Leadership Forecast 2027: research overview; 88% leadership-pipeline finding (2026). View source
2. DDI. New DDI Study Reveals Hidden Performance Risk as Depleted Leaders Navigate Change (Oct. 14, 2026). View source
3. Gallup. How Managers Impact Team Productivity (updated Sept. 30, 2026). View source
4. Gallup. State of the Global Workplace: 2026 Report (2025 survey data). View source
5. Lacerenza, C. N., Reyes, D. L., Marlow, S. L., Joseph, D. L., & Salas, E. (2017). Leadership training design, delivery, and implementation: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 102(12), 1686–1718. View source
6. DDI. New DDI Study: AI Coaching and Manager Coaching Work Best, Yet Only 1 in 4 Managers Coaches Well (Nov. 10, 2026). View source

7.

DDI. Leadership Development ROI Is Real; Proving It Is Harder (Nov. 10, 2026). View source

8. Gallup. Global Indicator: Employee Engagement (2026 data summary and managerial variance statement). View source
9. DDI. Strategic HR Teams Have Stronger Leadership Pipelines, Even After Restructuring (Nov. 10, 2026). View source

Research note: DDI's "Global Leadership Forecast 2027" is the title of a research series whose findings cited here were released in October and November 2026. Gallup's 2026 workplace report primarily covers 2025 survey results. Different surveys, populations, comparisons, and effect measures should not be combined or interpreted as a forecast of benefits from any one course. Research and links reviewed November 15, 2026.