Contemporary Issues in Leadership

Just What Does "World-Class Leadership Development" Look Like?

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Catalyzer, Inc.
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Executive Summary

Training magazine's "2023 Training Industry Report" shared that training expenditures in 2022-2023 "remained steady", inching up slightly to $101.8B. Further, "spending on outside products and services" (such as Catalyzer might offer) jumped by 23% to $10.1B in this same timeframe.

Engagement and well-being, according to Gallup's "State of the Global Workplace: 2022 Report" "remains stable but not great."

McKinsey, Harvard Business Review, and others plainly connect the dots…

- "The plethora of services, books, articles, seminars, conferences, and TED-like talks purporting to have the answers…are delivering disappointing results." (McKinsey)
- "Corporations are victims of the great training robbery…they are not getting a good return on their investment. For the most part, the learning doesn't lead to better organizational performance, because people soon revert to their old ways of doing things." (HBR)
- "Only 10% of CEOs say their leadership development programs have clear business impact." (Hogan)

That's not us…

For this paper we analyzed over a dozen academic and industry studies to identify those elements necessary for a leadership development program to be considered effective.

Our intent is to use this analysis as a framework to continue assessing Catalyzer's program development and to provide this analysis as a checklist for you to use – either in selection of an organization like ours or to provide us feedback regarding our program effectiveness.

Importantly, this analysis does not consider the motivations behind an organization's choosing to pursue leadership development, nor does it adequately address what program participants are obligated to do with the content (so that new learning is most effectively translated into more effective leadership behaviors).

Rather, we focus on the program structure that, when offered, raises Catalyzer's offerings into those that others consider to be "best-in-class."

Finally, given our role as consultant leadership developers, this content infers what client organizations should consider when engaging outside help.

We're about developing and delivering the most impactful leadership development solutions on the planet.

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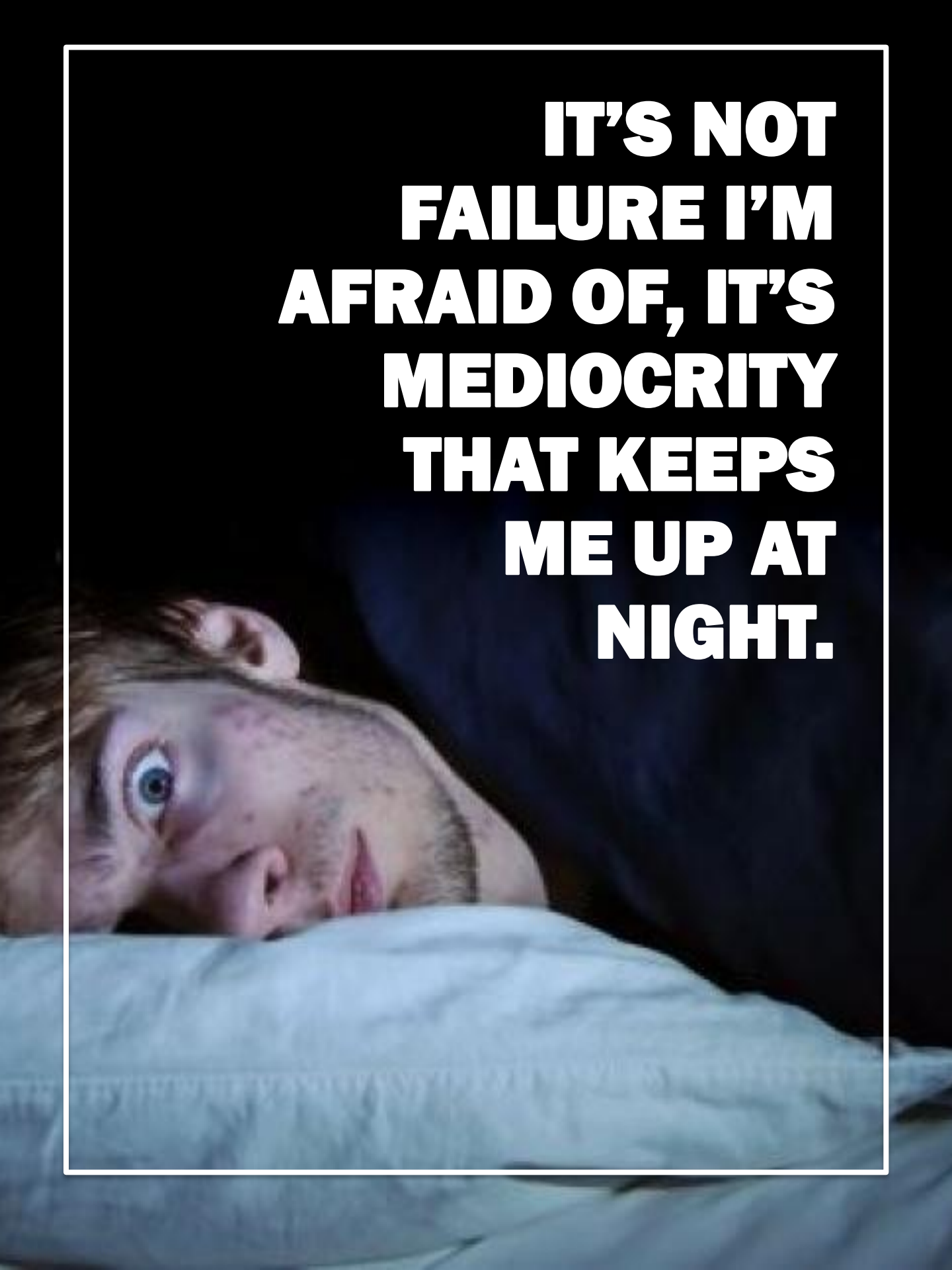
IT'S NOT FAILURE I'M AFRAID OF, IT'S MEDIOCRITY THAT KEEPS ME UP AT NIGHT.

World-Class Leadership Program Characteristics – A Checklist

TABLE 1: Characteristics of the Most Effective Leadership Development Programs

	PROGRAM CHARACTERISTIC	COMMONALITY (program characteristic mentioned in the work – of 11)	STUDY/PAPER (see citations list)											REMARKS
			HOLT	COLLINS	HERNEZ-BROOME	KIRCHNER	SWANSON	BRUNGARDT	DONNELLY	GURDJIAN	PERNICK	FESSER	SHRM	
❶	Contextually and Culturally Appropriate	72.7%	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Ties leadership development to the organization's mission, values, and strategy, as well as business processes. Involves real-world, business-specific examples.
❷	Mixed Delivery Means	72.7%	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	Delivery involves a combination of classroom, online, and experiential learning.
❸	Ongoing, Integral Program Assessments	54.5%		✓			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	One report highlighted that only 3% of programs are evaluated for financial impact. Involves both objective and subjective measurements.
❹	Defined/ Focused Leadership Competencies	36.4%	✓	✓	✓						✓			Critical to the organization's performance.
❺	Linked to Individual Development Programs	36.4%	✓								✓	✓	✓	Translate the program's delivery to individual growth in appropriate leadership behaviors.
❻	Multi-Echelon Program Participation	36.4%		✓	✓							✓	✓	Optimal when different levels of seniority and responsibility participate, and the program extends across the organization (breadth and depth of participation).
❼	Longer Duration	18.2%	✓								✓			A minimum of two, and up to three-to-five years (or longer).
❽	Preceded by a Formal Needs Analysis	18.2%		✓							✓			Some form of a Discovery process is critical.
❾	One-on-One Coaching	18.2%	✓									✓		Adds depth to group-delivered program content.
❿	Provides Time for Reflection	18.2%					✓			✓				Spacing between engagements.

And...What Great Practitioners Do

TABLE 2: Putting the Characteristics into Programmatic Practice

	PROGRAM CHARACTERISTIC	TOP PRACTITIONER APPROACHES	ADDITIONAL, WORLD-CLASS APPROACHES
❶	Contextually and Culturally Appropriate	They work to learn your business, walk your facilities, and talk with a cross-section of leaders (not just the executives/senior leadership) in your organization BEFORE beginning a program.. During execution, they build examples and scenarios into delivery that reflect the context where development will be applied.	• They invest THEIR time and money to learn your industry through active participation in national/regional/state trade associations. • They show up in your organization at times when they're not regularly scheduled to be there – to continue building relationships and expand on industry knowledge.
❷	Mixed Delivery Means	Experiences incorporate a mixture of approaches and activity types that ultimately address all adult learning styles.	They add experiences to include asynchronous learning outside the "training room" – via every communication mode available, but especially e-mail and text.
❸	Ongoing, Integral Program Assessments	• Establish and vet Key Performance Indicators w/ organizational leadership that link the program to larger business objectives. • Develop and integrate benchmark, mid-course, and end-of-program assessment that address KPIs and demonstrate efficacy.	• Add multiple, mid-program assessments and feedback sessions (with both the program cohort and organizational leadership) that enable mid-course correction, where appropriate. • "Professionalize" the activity by engaging I/O psychologists to develop rich, non-biased program assessments. • Tie invoicing and billing schedules to excellence in program execution.
❹	Defined/ Focused Leadership Competencies	Where a structure may not already exist, integrate "Building a Leader Brand" activity into the initiative. Leader brands characterize the unique way each organization identifies and develops their leadership (skills/competencies/attributes-focused).	
❺	Linked to Individual Development Programs		
❻	Multi-Echelon Program Participation		
❼	Longer Duration	Episodic delivery that plays out over time (enables practice and reflection), without stringing a program out to such an extent that participants struggle to remember and/or tie module-to-module concepts together. Consider "the forgetting curve."	
❽	Preceded by a Formal Needs Analysis	Some form of a formal Discovery process is an imperative.	NEVER recreate the wheel. Analyze and incorporate prior needs analysis efforts executed by the client organization and be prepared (in some circumstances) to respond with "you don't need us."
❾	One-on-One Coaching		
❿	Provides Time for Reflection	See "Longer Duration" above. Additionally, reflection enabled through "between-module" engagement via consulting organization prompts or directed journaling.	

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