

Training that Sticks and Creates Lasting Results

An interview with Dr. Elizabeth Fried

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During our discussions with Dr. Elizabeth Fried, we've realized that to truly get the most out of a 360-degree review process, the long-term goal should be to foster a coaching environment throughout the entire organization.

A coaching environment ensures that people know how to approach each other during their day-to-day jobs to give and receive feedback. This way, everyone is continuously engaged in improving their performance, which improves the organization's overall ability to satisfy customers and be profitable.

To continue last issue's discussion about how to communicate the results of a 360-degree survey, we move on to the topic of training.

How does a company go from a 360-degree review process toward fostering a genuine coaching environment? How can you ensure that your organization sees results from the training dollars it invests?

Dr. Elizabeth Fried takes us through a process that will help make the new soft skills that your people are learning "stick."

Fried is a renowned expert on workplace behaviour and how to manage it. Aside from running a successful HR consulting firm, she regularly gives speeches and has been quoted in *Business Week*, *Fortune Magazine*, *Ms.*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*.

What is the importance of leadership training and how can it generate lasting changes?

Leadership training is important for the supervisors in your company because these people have a direct impact on moving your company toward a positive coaching environment. When these people begin coaching their employees, they become models. So those who are being coached come to understand how it is done and then they can help others.

In this way, coaching is passed down from person-to-person and becomes a part of the environment. This environment is critical to reinforcing the right behaviours.

Unfortunately, coaching environments are usually found only in exceptional companies. In most other cases, the 360-degree review process and subsequent training and development efforts often end up diluted or lost.

For example, after going through a 360-review process with its supervisors, a company can spend thousands of dollars on leadership training that, in the end, has very little effect on behavioural change.

In fact, you can get the best leadership training in the world for people, but more often than not, they will revert to their habitual behaviours.

How can we stop wasting training dollars?

It begins with an understanding that, in the areas of supervision and leadership, we are dealing with primarily soft skills.

Changing soft skills is very difficult because when faced with a specific stimulus, we are asking learners to switch from an ineffective behaviour to an effective one. And these ineffective behaviours have typically been with us for a long, long time — probably our whole lives.

In order to change the behaviour, your brain has to form new neural networks and that takes time and practice to be comfortable.

Just like learning a new tennis swing. It feels odd at first, and you'll probably be worse before you get better; but then, after practice, practice, practice, it feels right and delivers results in the long run.

Now, that's a very concrete example. Learning a new tennis swing is actually easier than changing a soft skill.

So how does a company help its employees change their soft skills?

The key to learning a new skill and getting it to stick is to apply a very systematic process which I refer to as ABRA, a form of *reverse magic*—because the process allows you to build skills that don't disappear. When you apply it, and apply it rigorously, the skills will *automagically* show up when needed.

The process is as follows...

A stands for Assessment: You do a pre-assessment of the skills to be taught in the leadership training program. This pre-assessment is conducted using an automated feedback platform, like Blue/360, that is reviewed by the learner, the manager, and the training department.

In this particular case, we are talking about feedback that is not a full 360, we are talking about feedback that is more like 180-degree feedback. The people involved in the assessment are the learner's manager above, and employees below, in the organizational chain. This particular review will not be confidential. The manager will see this information so that they can help the learner develop, and the trainer will know where the learner may need particular help.

So by the time the learner goes to class, they know what needs to be worked on and why they are taking the course.

Also, this initial data can later be compared to post-assessment data to measure any behavioural change. In this way, the pre-assessment sets the stage for learning and creates motivation.

Another important function of the pre-assessment is that it makes managers accountable for training as well. This is critical because often managers think, “My responsibility for training is that I budgeted for it and that’s good enough.”

But that’s not good enough. In order to make the learning stick, the manager needs to be accountable for a portion of that training — the coaching part of it.

So when you do the pre-assessment of the skills, this allows the manager to look out for the skills they need to coach.

B stands for Building skills: During the training, it is important to make sure you have a practical program that meets the needs of the learner by allowing for skill-building, role modelling, and practice.

The program should use adult learning principles and have a broad mix of activities to allow for different learning styles and keep the learner from getting bored.

Adult learners need to be interactive and to have an opportunity to practice role-modeling behaviours with each other. Information should be delivered in chunks and needs to be practical — not just a bunch of theories.

I particularly like the programs put out by Vital Learning Corporation, which meet all the adult learning objectives. Their award-winning supervision series is practical, engaging, and cost-effective.

They not only offer classroom options, but have an online series with content that is fully integrated with their classroom materials. So if someone misses a class, they can quickly catch up on the content and be up to speed with others. Additionally, if there are no classes at the time a supervisor is promoted, he or she can quickly gain the basic skills until the next set of formal classes are scheduled.

For more information on this, go to www.TheLearningEngine.org

R stands for Repetition and

Reinforcement: If you think back to elementary school, how did you learn to do anything? Practice, repetition, and practice. Well, it is no different here. You need to provide the learner, after they get the initial skills, opportunities to refresh, to practice, to talk about it, and to be coached.

This coaching could come in the form of one-on-one with a manager, or it could come in the form of coaching from peers, if you have a coaching culture. You could create lunch-and-learns where people have the opportunity to talk about their successes and challenges.

It is also useful to have an online learning component that can act as a ramp-up to the training program or as a refresher during and afterward.

A stands for Assessment again. Here you are going to do a post-check six months after the training is done. This final review determines the level of achievement.

Again, managers get to see this and identify the improvements that have taken place and if there are areas where learners need further help. Maybe the learners need to go to a class again. Maybe they need further coaching, or maybe their position isn’t working for them and they need to move to another job. In the end, this follow-up assessment ensures that the learners know they are going to be checked again.

This sounds like a good process. How does a company get started?

You need to get commitment from your top leaders to spend the time and the dollars on the front end in order to reap the benefits. Then, you basically need two tools:

- ◆ a flexible feedback platform, such as Blue/360, to conduct your initial and follow-up assessments
- ◆ a quality adult training program that is affordable and practical.

Although it may seem overwhelming to begin the process toward cultural change in your organization, the rewards are incredible.

I'm using this process with an aerospace company right now, and the people who have taken the program seriously are experiencing dramatic results.

I talked to the HR manager the other day, who told me that several employees had commented that they couldn't believe the change in their supervisor.

He didn't yell any more. He listened. He helped them. And the employees were excited about their jobs again.

So by paying attention to the soft skills of its supervisors, this company is turning around its culture.

And research shows that this will affect the bottom line. An engaged employee is more productive and creates greater customer satisfaction. Who is responsible for creating employee engagement? The leaders in the company: supervisors and managers. If you train them properly, using an automated feedback platform such as Blue/360, coach them, and offer them a variety of opportunities for practice and reinforcement, they will be able to engage their employees to increase the bottom line of the company.

You can learn more about Dr. Fried, her business, and the resources she has to offer at www.TheLearningEngine.Org and www.MyExecutiveCoach.net.

She offers a complimentary one-week pass to a highly interactive, engaging, and fun online course entitled *Essential Skills of Communication*.