

Think You Don't Have Time to Build Your People? Think Again

If you boil corporate leadership down to its bare essentials, executives around the globe really only have two key missions:

1. **Build Business**—increase revenues and profits, grow volume and market share, expand into new territories, create new business alliances, etc.
2. **Build People**—help employees upgrade their skills and increase their knowledge so that they can grow personally and professionally, advance in their careers, and deliver increasingly more for the organization.

Most corporate leaders judge how well they are performing by the size of the businesses they lead. “I’ve taken on a bigger regional responsibility,” they will say, or “I’ve moved from managing \$XX million dollars in revenue to \$XXX million.”

Yet, in reality, at the senior level, it’s far more important to build people than to build business. Why? Because the higher you rise in an organization, the more people you are responsible for—and the more you simply cannot do it alone. In fact, at the upper echelons of businesses, it is not possible to do your job well unless you focus more on developing people than building business.

People development is especially vital during times of change, and these days, change comes fast, furiously, and often unexpectedly. This holds true regardless of the type of business you run—a service business, a manufacturing / product-focused business, or any other kind.

Despite this, many leaders focus the bulk of their time and attention on building business, relegating employee development to a distant second on their priority lists.

The Single Lamest Excuse for Not Building Your Team

Leaders often tell me, “I know I should focus more on developing my team. But the reality is, I just don’t have the time. I’m already putting in 13-hour days building the business. There isn’t an extra minute to spend on developing people.”

I consider this the single lamest excuse for not focusing on building your team’s skills. Why? Because growing your people’s capabilities shouldn’t be a separate job nor an extra time-consuming activity.

As a senior executive coach, I often “shadow” senior leaders in action as they lead teams or run meetings. That gives me the privilege of witnessing firsthand what works well and where there’s room for improvement. Throughout these experiences, one thing has become perfectly clear: The best leaders demonstrate that building business and building people are fully inte-

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grated processes. Developing people is not a “task” to be added to a to-do list; it is a *mindset*.

As a leader, not only is it important for you to remain coachable, but you must also be a great on-the-job coach yourself. In fact, I encourage you to go through your day with this thought in mind: *Every moment is a coaching moment*. If you think of building people in that way, it becomes less of a daunting task.

- When a direct report does something well, let him or her know right away. That way, it becomes clear what you consider good work, and team members will continue to produce the same or better results.
- Likewise, if a direct report does something “not so well,” it’s your job to let that person know right away and coach him or her to consider how to do it better next time.

As you can see, both situations offer coaching opportunities that are integrated into your day-to-day work life. The best leaders make people development a seamless part of their work, and they recognize coaching moments on a regular basis.

- First, they give their direct reports the right challenges and responsibilities to help them grow.
- Second, they interact with direct reports in ways that challenge employees to think about and strengthen their own leadership capacities.

Again, the best leaders do this constantly and naturally as they go about building business.

Bottom line: Coaching team members to improve isn’t a separate activity that takes extra time—it is a mindset that can be learned and embraced. Developing the people you lead allows your direct reports to take on more responsibilities so that they are constantly learning, and that gives you more time in the long run because you will eventually be able to delegate more. The outcome? I’ve seen this essential shift in mindset and behavior help leaders shift stressed-out, 14- to 16-hour workdays to a calm and confident 8 to 10 hours. By keeping in mind that every moment is a coaching moment, you too can begin to experience building business and building people as wholly integrated processes.

BRENDA BENCE

**BUILDING SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP BRANDS
FOR COMPANIES AND EXECUTIVES**

Brenda S. Bence is an internationally-recognized branding expert, Certified Executive Coach, Certified Speaking Professional, and the author of several award-winning books, including the *How YOU™ Are Like Shampoo* personal branding series and *Smarter Branding Without Breaking the Bank*.

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After earning her MBA from Harvard, Brenda spent the bulk of her career as an executive in Fortune 100 multinationals, building brands across dozens of countries spanning four continents. Now, as President of her own company, Brand Development Associates International, she travels the world speaking, training, and coaching individuals and companies to greater success through creative yet practical corporate and personal brand development. Visit www.BrendaBence.com.

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