

Effective Development (ACS)

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2005, published in the *Houston Home Journal* on Tuesday, November 8, 2005

The Center for Creative Leadership is the world's largest institution devoted to leadership research and education. Their [Handbook of Leadership Development](#) is a compendium of thirty years of their insights. The reference would be a valuable addition to the library of any Human Resource professional.

Have you ever wondered how to evaluate the effectiveness of leadership development efforts? [The Handbook](#) suggests that you consider the degree to which the elements of assessment, challenge, and support are built into the development experience.

Assessment. Assessment information points out the gaps between a person's current performance and some desired future state. If possible, measure the skill of the individual before and after the developmental experience.

If the area of focus is important to the individual, and if he or she believes in the accuracy of the assessment, there is usually motivation to improve capability in that area. Having this awareness usually provides clues to how to close the gap. "Working harder" is not the only available strategy! "Assessment" helps people understand their strengths and weaknesses. "Assessment" stimulates them to capitalize on potential learning opportunities.

Challenge. Comfort is the enemy of growth and improvement. We tend to go about our daily lives using habitual ways of thinking and interacting. We rely on our strengths and we usually achieve the outcomes we expect. Growth occurs, however, when we face circumstances where our strengths seem inadequate and outcomes seem beyond our control. Challenging experiences force us out of our comfort zones. Situations that demand skills beyond our current capabilities stretch us, encouraging us to look for new insights and to try new responses.

We cannot have both beneficial development and comfort. Improvement is change, and change can be quite uncomfortable. When the outcomes of a situation matter to us, we are motivated to try new options to meet the challenge. The challenge may require becoming competent in new areas, achieving difficult goals, managing conflicts, or overcoming the pain of loss and failure. Growth comes because we put energy into understanding complex situations, reshaping how we think, or developing new skills.

Support. Though growth requires the disequilibrium that challenging experiences provide, we also need safety while it is occurring. Further, we need assurance that there will be a new equilibrium on the other side of change. While experiencing the struggle and pain of "challenge," we need the support of the people around us to affirm that we are valuable and capable of learning and growing. Support comes from bosses, coworkers, family, friends, and professional colleagues. They listen to our stories, relate to our challenges, suggest options for coping, provide needed resources, inspire, celebrate, encourage, and reassure.

The support is needed both organizationally and personally. If either is missing, development will probably languish. For example, you may have a great boss, hugely supportive of your personal growth. But if there is no accepted leadership development process, you'll both be frustrated by the organizational resistance. Alternatively, if your organization has great developmental systems, but your boss provides no nurturing encouragement or coaching, you're an unusual individual if you are strong enough to maintain enough motivation to generate significant growth.

My objective each week in these columns is to encourage you to build future leaders in your organization. I work to give you specific, practical methods for enhancing the skills of individuals with potential. Today, I want you to note that you can enhance any leadership development experience—such as a training program, a new job assignment, or matching an individual with a mentor—by consciously considering how to build greater assessment, challenge, and support into these activities.