



PEAK DEVELOPMENT

10 Years of

by Mindy L. Hall, Ph.D.

*Cultivating
Unlocking
Reflecting
Thinking
Growing
Learning
Leading
Shaping
Thriving
Advising
Teaching
Listening
Coaching
Exploring
Designing
Consulting
Developing
Facilitating*



Unlocking your company's potential

Organizations grow when people grow.

Thank You

When we first began brainstorming ways to celebrate Peak Development's 10th Anniversary, we generated a lot of ideas; some good, some...not so much. To narrow them down, we asked what we thought were some fairly straightforward questions:

- How do we want people to remember the 10th Anniversary?
- What do clients tell us Peak Development means to them?
- What qualities have made our longevity possible?

What began as a way to help us sift through ideas, quickly brought us back to our core values.

We want people to feel more capable and better equipped to do their work. We want people to know that one person can make a difference. We want people to realize that organizations grow when people grow. These are the ideas that we carried into our 10th Anniversary. While some celebration was definitely in order, we also wanted to mark the occasion in a way that provided business value to our clients.

To that end, we published a series on our Web site over the course of 2006 called "10 Years of Learning." Each month provided a look back at one of the most important lessons learned over our first decade, both from and with clients. As with all of Peak Development's writing, we've provided questions to stimulate your thinking and practical tips for putting the ideas to use.

Now, as the 10th Anniversary has come to a close, we're pleased to provide you with all of these essays in one volume. It's our way of saying thank you for being a part of Peak Development's first decade. I look forward to sharing even more learning with you in the years to come.

Regards,
Mindy

You Are Your Own Best Tool

Everything you do sends a message: what you say and how you say it; what you do and how you do it; even whether you attend a given meeting or event. While many executives are careful about how they come across in official communications, they are often less attentive to the informal, everyday interactions which shape people's perceptions. As perceptions are reality, these informal behaviors become key determinants for how people choose to engage. In a time when engagement is both crucial and elusive, it is important to consciously consider how your behavior and language impact others on a daily basis.

For some individuals, connecting with others comes quite naturally, for others it requires a more conscious effort. What's more, the behavior needed differs from person to person, and from situation to situation. Developing this aptitude is possible, however, and begins the moment you start reflecting on the following questions:

*Know yourself, and consciously
choose your behavior.*

- Do I do what I say I am going to do? Do I follow through on actions? Am I seen as someone who can be relied upon?
- Am I experienced as a direct, truthful person? Do I take others' confidences seriously? Do I admit mistakes?
- Am I aware of my own filters and preconceptions? Do I react out of emotion or act from a thoughtful, deliberate frame of mind?
- What kind of environment do I create in my interactions with others? How do I enter a space? Do people experience me as cynical, positive, detached, present, defensive, scattered, focused? Do people believe that I am a person who "opens up" or "closes down" conversations?

These are simple questions, but they go a long way toward helping you understand how to create environments where engagement is the norm.

With this awareness in place, success becomes a matter of intention: recognizing which behaviors will return the best results, and operating intentionally to achieve them. Put more plainly: know yourself, and consciously choose your behavior. Again, simple in theory, but it requires tremendous self-discipline.

In every interaction, you are the pivotal element. You have the ability to tailor your message and your actions to suit the situation, and, ultimately, to shape the outcome. You must, therefore, begin to see yourself as being as important to that outcome as any materials you reference or tools you employ. You may work with different people, in different functions, or in different cultures throughout your career, but your self-awareness and your ability to operate with intention will serve you well no matter where you go. With these skills, you will ensure that you are always your own best tool.

Numbers Don't Tell the Whole Story

Business is often about the numbers: the bottom line, the head count, the survey scores, the length of time to market. Each of these numbers is important, to be sure, but they only tell part of the story. What's missing? In a word, context. You may have made the bottom line, but are your people motivated to sustain the effort? You may have a workable headcount, but do you know the level of engagement of your workforce? Your high potentials may be focusing on their development, but what is the impact of these efforts?

I believe that much of business is locked into a Western notion of the value of quantitative analysis. We believe that mathematics returns absolute results; that numbers are sufficient to tell the story of a business. The problem is that businesses are comprised of humans, and human behavior is difficult to quantify. A much more complete picture of a given issue or challenge can be gained by including qualitative measurements in data collection. Qualitative data ranges from formal to informal: from structured focus groups, to surveys with open-ended questions, to one-on-one interviews or conversations. It provides an understanding of context, quality, and the story behind the numbers. As an example, in a sales environment the quality of each customer interaction is equally as important as the quantity of sales calls.

To some, qualitative data can feel amorphous or overly subjective: leaders may feel like they have a few key themes or general ideas, but little specific direction. One way to address this concern is to use qualitative data in concert with quantitative data, to help paint a total picture of a given situation. I would also argue that much of the “soft” feel of qualitative measures comes from the presentation of such data. A rigorously applied methodology—from the design of the data collection tools to the thematic analysis—can help assure leaders that qualitative data is more than just some random thoughts from a few quick conversations.

Once you begin incorporating qualitative data, you will find it quickly becomes an indispensable analytic tool. Below are a few items to consider as you incorporate qualitative data into your business metrics:

- Master the art of the follow-up question: regularly ask the questions “why?” and “how?”
- If your organization uses surveys regularly, are open-ended questions included? If not, is there room to do so? If so, are they returning the most useful information? How could they be changed/improved?
- Look at your company’s Profit & Loss statement. Consider the quality of the organization’s top revenue drivers. Can they be improved? How would different audiences (i.e. customers, competitors, employees, etc.) describe their experiences with these drivers? How would they describe the quality of these drivers?
- A recent study found that the average analyst bases 35% of his/her investment decisions on non-financial variables. What would those variables be in your company? How are they perceived in the organization? What is your process for measuring these non-financial variables?

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The Power of Culture

Every company has a culture: regardless of size, age, or industry. What separates many leading companies from their competitors is the ability to intentionally shape and leverage culture to bolster business goals and create an environment where people are inspired to achieve extraordinary results.

Cultures are built—and change—over time: it takes thousands of actions, both large and small, over a period of weeks, months, and years. However, one person can and often does make a difference: much of building culture, at any level, centers on personal ownership and responsibility. Whether shaping culture for an organization of thousands working around the world or for a small team at a single location, many of the necessary leadership characteristics and behaviors remain the same, and begin with the individual:

- **Vision**—Can you communicate the organization’s vision in plain language which engages people both emotionally and intellectually? Can you paint a compelling picture of the future for others in the organization?
- **Respect**—Do you model the organization’s values and actively support its vision? Do your actions match your words? Do you listen to others’ concerns?
- **Trustworthiness**—Do you do what you say you are going to do? Can someone sit across a table from you and believe what you say? Are your intentions clear?
- **Communication**—Do you make time to communicate face-to-face? Do you tailor your messages to your audience, meeting them where they live? Do you communicate regularly with all stakeholders?

In my work, I see every day the effects a cohesive organizational culture can have; I experience the possibilities created by employees who are passionate, committed, and striving for a purpose larger than themselves. In bottom-line language, the impact shows in customer relationships, product quality, recruitment, retention rates, productivity, and more. Viewed in this context, it is clear that shaping an organization's culture is more than "nice to do," but a business imperative which has a tangible, meaningful impact on the financial results of any organization.

*Create an environment where people are
inspired to achieve extraordinary results.*

Shaping organizational culture simply requires a choice; a choice to lead, to communicate, to reinforce the behaviors you want to see in the organization, and to commit to a sustained effort. Above all, remember that culture is shaped by invitation, not mandate; by commitment, not compliance. At the end of the day, some may decline the invitation, but the ones who accept will want to be there, and self-selection makes a world of difference in the level of energy generated. As your desired culture begins to take shape and others choose to join in, you create engagement that sustains itself, because people will nourish what they help create.

Valuing Continual Learning

Learning experiences run the gamut from incremental understandings to profound shifts of core beliefs and assumptions. As competition and market pressures continue to increase, however, incremental learning may not be enough to facilitate the shifts in mindset and skill set necessary to keep pace with rapidly changing business environments. In these times of dramatic change, I have found that transformational learning experiences—those which encourage reflection on who one is, in addition to what one does—quickly become essential for both individual and organizational success.

The goal for transformative learning is not simply to impart skills, but to build an individual's capacity to continually develop. To borrow from the proverb, it is not about giving someone a fish and feeding them for a day, it is about teaching someone to fish so they can feed themselves for life. Central to this approach is the development of both self-awareness and inquiry skills. By critically reflecting on the assumptions and meaning schemes that guide one's thinking, individuals begin to understand not only their interpretation of the world, but the filters and mental models that have led to those interpretations. As a result, they become more adept at seeing how assumptions guide everything from what organizations consider possible to the outcomes they can hope to achieve.

Unlike incremental learning, transformational learning is highly dependent on the individual's readiness to learn. While no one can make another individual want to learn, we can create opportunities and environments that both facilitate learning and cause it to flourish by:

- Encouraging leaders to set the tone of being open to learning by modeling the behavior. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter said: "Leaders are more powerful role models when they learn than when they teach."
- Beginning with an intention of developing human potential, with the belief that the business will grow as a natural result. If this intention is questionable in the eyes of the participants, outcomes will suffer.

- Considering both the physical and psychological environments needed to create a climate conducive to self-discovery and self-growth. The ideal environment blends risk and safety, a “stepping out” of one’s comfort zone, but a stepping out where one can do so in a safe way.

By better understanding oneself and one’s frames of reference, an individual can experience profound shifts which continue to pay dividends over time. Individuals will find that they are more able to consciously choose their behavior and significantly impact their environments. As employees grow, so too will the organization as a whole. Therefore, by creating opportunities for transformational learning, businesses are in fact promoting their own growth.

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The Case for Building Internal Capacity

Over my years of working with organizations, I have noticed an increasing frustration with traditional consulting models, especially among companies seeking to change their cultures or organization designs. This frustration often presents as a series of questions: “Why can’t we do this ourselves? Don’t we know the organization better than an external consultant? Shouldn’t our leaders know how to do this? Is this the best use of our resources?”

In some instances, there is a real need for an outside perspective or for specific expertise. Too often, however—whether due to lack of time or to a perceived prestige—companies hire an outside firm to complete projects for them rather than working to develop the capabilities of their internal leaders.

While it seems self-evident, organizations that focus on building capacity become less dependent on external resources and more able to do for themselves. Staff who lead these initiatives gain skills, build confidence in their abilities, and are often more engaged because, by seeking their leadership, the organization has displayed its trust in them. Further, as employees feel a sense of ownership in their work and responsibility for seeing it continue, internally-led projects are more likely to be sustained.

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Organizations, as the purchasers of consulting services, have enormous leverage to change the prevailing model. Doing so begins with a simple shift in mindset, from outsourcing work to seeking a partner in the truest sense of the word. The following questions may prove helpful in evaluating opportunities:

- Considering a specific project, what is really needed?
- Will the organization experience the outcomes differently if the project is led internally or externally?
- Are there high-potential individuals in the organization who would benefit from the experience of working on the initiative?

Many of Peak Development's clients have seen benefits in a model that focuses equally on accomplishing organizational goals and strengthening internal capacity. In this model, rather than serving as the "face" of the project, the consultant serves more as a behind-the-scenes advisor: designing the project with the client, providing added expertise and guidance where needed, as well as coaching internal leaders on effective execution. In many cases, the larger organization may not even be aware an external resource is involved. While certainly not a method that suits every situation, it is one example of how organizations can approach their challenges differently.

Especially when considering large-scale organizational changes, the process used is integral to the outcomes achieved: externally- and internally-led initiatives will often lead organizations to dramatically different outcomes. Companies that invite their leaders to take meaningful roles in the process will find that they not only achieve their short-term objectives, but create sustainability to meet future challenges with confidence.

The Social Impact of Organization Design

Good organization design grabs the company's attention and focuses it squarely on particular issues. It emanates from an overall vision of the organization, shapes the tone or operating style, and becomes an essential tool for transforming strategy into reality. While there is not a "one-size-fits-all" method for implementing "good design," by carefully considering the impact of such a process, a company can go a long way towards ensuring its success.

It is important for companies to appreciate the impact a redesign will have on employees' roles, the quality of their work-life, their attitudes toward their work, and their relationships with their colleagues (bosses, peers, employees). Organization design has a social component inherent in its implementation that has a direct business impact on both the output of the organization and its bottom line. Therefore, the social and cultural aspects of an organizational design change must be managed as rigorously as the technical aspects.

Some questions for organizations to ask include:

- What are the ripple effects resulting from the redesign that can be foreseen?
- Who will be affected by the redesign? How?
- Where are the "snipers" likely to come from? How will you manage them?
- Who needs to have a voice in the process? How will they be included?
- Who should be kept in the informational loop? (employees? unions? customers? stakeholders?)
- What vehicles will be needed to reach them? How often?

Many organizations benefit by including employees from all levels in the design process. The closer a person is to the actual tasks and processes in question, the deeper their understanding and knowledge of what works, as well as what can be improved. Also, as individuals are more invested in work they create, companies that include employees in the redesign build commitment and engagement, which can have a meaningful impact on the business results.

Above all else, a redesign cannot be seen as a quick fix, as the best designs evolve over time, recognizing that change is an ongoing process. However, when leaders present a clear, compelling reason for change and engage employees in a carefully considered process to address it, they lay the groundwork for a transformation the whole organization will commit to sustain.

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Everyday Interactions and the Bottom Line

Everyday interactions impact the bottom line in ways that are both powerful and surprising. A key component of powerful leadership is the sense of connection a leader creates with others; whether they are perceived as present, genuine, trustworthy and inspiring. As the feeling of connection is shaped through a series of individual interactions, these interactions become a leader's currency. The implication for leaders is the necessity to actively manage every interaction, both formal and informal. One of the most powerful manners of doing so is not a matter of how you talk, or what you say, but rather how you listen.

Your engagement in interactions is continually transmitted by a series of verbal and nonverbal cues. When you commit to being fully present, you send a message that others in the conversation are important to you, that their opinions and their time are valuable. Establishing this kind of environment creates a foundation for a more productive workforce which has a direct impact on the bottom line. It all begins with the decision to interact with people more fully.

*Listening differently
creates new possibilities.*

Ask yourself the following questions to evaluate the atmosphere you create in interactions. If you're not happy with the answers, try a different approach in your next interaction and observe the impact of how listening differently creates new possibilities.

- People experience my listening skills as...?
- Do I listen to others objectively?
- Would people describe me as a person who “opens up” or “closes down” communication?
- What verbal and nonverbal cues am I sending that tell others I am actively listening?
- What kind of environment do I create in my interactions with others?
- How do I enter a space? Do people experience me as cynical, positive, detached, present, defensive, scattered, focused?

We spend a lot of time learning to speak, and an even greater amount perfecting the practice; but not enough learning how to listen. By committing yourself fully to an interaction, by choosing to actively listen rather than passively hear, you forge positive connections which enhance your leadership impact and ultimately your bottom line.

One Person Can Make a Difference

“Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed people to change the world. In fact, it is the only thing that ever has.”—Margaret Mead

One person can make a difference. It’s one of the core beliefs that has guided Peak Development’s growth over the past 10 years. Just six simple words, yet it offers a compelling and challenging way of approaching the world.

When you operate from a belief that one person can make a difference, you’re operating from a mindset of possibility. First, for yourself: knowing that you, personally, can make a difference. You have the skills, experiences, and creativity to effect change (or, if not, you have the ability to acquire them). You project confidence. You look for opportunities instead of seeing barriers. What’s more, you begin to see possibilities in others; to ask: What do they have to offer? How might they make a difference? What could they do if given the right circumstances? Each interaction becomes an opportunity for learning and development.

Believing that one person can make a difference leads you to challenge your preconceptions on size. In Western business, we operate from a mindset that bigger is better; that the more resources you devote to something, the greater your return will be. Yet when we approach challenges by asking, “how could one person have the greatest impact here?” we open ourselves to creative solutions. We begin to think less in terms of imposing activities and more in terms of influencing systems. More, it leads you to ask whether size is the best indicator of success: whether impact and sustainability might be of equal or greater value.

Operating from this belief isn’t always easy. It requires courage: to speak when others are remaining silent, to leap before you know the net will appear. It requires persistence when all signs point to failure.

The following questions may be helpful when considering your sense of possibility:

- In what areas would you like to be having a greater impact? What do you feel is preventing you?
- Name someone you admire who's made a difference. What did they do? What qualities did they possess? How could you build those qualities in yourself?
- When was the last time you felt you couldn't make a difference? What made you feel that way? How could that feeling have been changed?
- What would you do differently if you thought anything was possible?

*Think less in terms of imposing activities
and more in terms of influencing systems.*

I've come to realize that, in addition to the outcomes Peak Development achieves with our clients, one of our most valuable skills is our ability to renew a sense of possibility. Many people have lost faith in their organizations and in their own abilities. Whether due to organizational constraints, inconsistent leadership, or shifting priorities, people have learned to be skeptical. Sometimes, turning skepticism into belief is simply a matter of setting an example. So, go ahead: be the person who believes and makes a difference. Start today.

Choosing to Change

Organizational and individual transformation is fundamentally a matter of choice: when people see a clear advantage to change, they choose, on an emotional level, to make a shift. Change can happen in any environment, however when you create a climate that is safe for change—both for yourself and for others—the results often come more quickly and prove to be longer-lasting.

When faced with change, it can often feel as if you are at the mercy of your environment. Learning to recognize that a choice exists allows you to approach the change with a sense of empowerment. Once the choice is identified, you can consider it as you would any other business decision, choosing the behaviors which have the greater benefit for yourself and your organization. Try the following:

- When faced with a change ask, “What are the benefits? For myself? For my team or company?”
- It is important to note that the choice is not simply whether to change, but also how to change. How fully will you engage? What will you do to advance the change in your organization?
- Think about a time when you embraced change. Describe the environment and the factors that influenced your behavior. How could you help re-create this environment for yourself? For others?
- Think about a time when you resisted change. What was happening? Why were you resistant? Is there anything that would have made you feel different? What did you ultimately do?
- Challenge yourself to be conscious of your behavior for one full day. Ask yourself, “Why am I choosing this behavior? Is this the best approach, or is there a benefit to operating differently?”

*People do not so much
resist change as they resist
being changed.*

On an organizational level, there are clear advantages to creating environments where people feel safe to change: less resistance to change means faster implementation, greater engagement results in more meaningful, sustainable results. Mechanisms for creating these kinds of environments include:

- **Leadership**—Senior leaders are instrumental in setting the tone and modeling the behavior for an organization. Have you clearly articulated the case for change (defining the change and outlining its benefits)? Do your actions match your words?
- **Communication**—Pay careful attention to language, vehicles, and frequency. Are you using language that engages people both emotionally and intellectually? Are you communicating with people in a variety of formats, including face-to-face? Are you sending frequent and consistent messages that encourage the organizational change you are trying to facilitate?
- **Reinforcement**—Is the change being rewarded in the organization? How? While there may be times when financial incentives are necessary, often the opportunity to develop a new skill, to be recognized in front of one's peers, or even to work toward a greater goal are more powerful motivators.

Through more than 20 years of working in human and organizational behavior, I have found that people do not so much resist change as they resist being changed. However, when we create a safe environment and entice people to choose change, they enter the process with energy and creativity, unlocking exciting new possibilities in both the organization and themselves.

Reflecting on Experience

One of the most important yet least practiced phases of any project is reflecting on the experience and what it can teach. Especially in today's hectic business climate, by the time one project has come to an end, we are already engaged in the next. However, taking the time to reflect on lessons learned can have a significant impact on future performance, both for you and your organization

I once knew a leader who, whenever anyone returned from a development opportunity, would take them for a walk and ask, "what did you learn?" Answering this question required employees to reflect on their learning and put it into a coherent context, cementing the experience. This simple practice cost the company nothing, but they estimated that it increased the retention rate for development opportunities by 3–5 times.

*Reflection is what allows you to
operate intentionally.*

There is a biological basis for this phenomenon. Recent research in neuroscience has shown that the amount of attention paid to a new insight determines how well it is retained. Each time our focus is drawn to a specific idea, we literally strengthen a circuit in our brain. With enough attention, these circuits become permanent, intrinsic parts of our thinking. Similarly, processes become entrenched in organizations through repeated use. As such, reflecting on experience can be a useful mechanism for stimulating a company's growth, offering an opportunity to reinforce or change business practices.

To ensure that reflection becomes part of your company's culture, plan specific review meetings into your projects and team meetings, then follow-through and make them a priority. In many instances, it will be helpful for people to reflect on both organization/team performance and on their individual performance.

On an individual level, ask:

- What did I learn from this experience?
- Am I pleased with my performance? Why or why not?
- What assumptions did I make at the start of the process? Were those assumptions accurate? Were they helpful?
- How will I operate differently in the future?

For the organization/team:

- Did our performance meet expectations? Why or why not?
- Where did we experience bottlenecks? Delays? Other issues? How can these be avoided in the future?
- What worked well? How can those practices be shared in the organization?
- Are there individuals who deserve special recognition for their role in the initiative?
- How did the organization/team experience the initiative? Does that match our intentions?
- If we had it to do over again, is there anything we would do differently?
- What accomplishment are we most proud of?

Especially at the end of the year, it is natural for people to reflect on their experiences and take stock of their progress. Take advantage of this impulse and schedule some structured time for yourself in the coming weeks to think about what you've learned this year. Write down your thoughts so you'll increase your focus and strengthen the impact. While it may feel awkward at first, reflection is what allows you to operate intentionally, consciously choosing your actions and maximizing your impact on the organization.

More to Learn

Ten years is a long time. As I reflect on the last decade of Peak Development's history, however, those ten years have passed quickly, giving proof to the old adage, "time flies when you're having fun!" Throughout it all, I've worked hard to make sure the important things—the values that lie at the core of the business—have remained consistent. Beyond that, I have tried to remain open to the things that life has to teach along the way.

As part of Peak Development's 10th anniversary, we've taken the opportunity throughout the year to share some of the most important learnings from our first decade. I hope they have provided some helpful perspectives for your own development. It's been a challenge to narrow down the list of topics each month, so for the final installment of these reflections, I thought I'd briefly share some more of what I've learned:

- Culture is built one person at a time.
- People do not resist change, they resist being changed.
- Organizations cannot mandate trust: it must be earned over time.
- As people climb higher in organizations, their success becomes less dependent on what they do and more dependent on who they are.
- Many leaders get by operating from instinct; if they become intentional in their leadership, however, they can truly thrive.
- Overcommunication is rare; in fact, effective execution of communication strategies is one of the biggest gaps in successful organizational change.
- These days, leadership requires a higher level of sophistication; successful leaders of the future will need so much more than functional competency.
- Every action has an impact; choose wisely the impact you want to have.
- In most organizations, employees have a wealth of untapped potential.
- Human assets provide the only sustainable competitive advantage on which to build your organization's future.

With each new day and each new project, I am reminded that there is always more to learn. As we enter Peak Development's second decade, I look forward to doing that learning with you.

*There is always
more to learn.*

Peak Development Consulting, LLC

Peak Development delivers a full suite of custom organization and professional development solutions. Our clients include leading pharmaceutical, technology, and biotechnology companies throughout North America, Europe, and Asia. We are committed to building the long-term capacity of the organizations with which we work. Whether shaping cultures, cultivating leaders, developing teams, or building HR capacity, our goal is to deliver the best solutions for our clients' unique business challenges

Mindy Hall, Ph.D.

Since founding Peak Development Consulting, LLC in 1996, Mindy has worked with clients around the world to create sustainable organization and leadership development solutions. As President and CEO of Peak Development, Mindy currently works with executives to strengthen both their leadership and their organizations' performance. Her focus is on transferring knowledge: helping leaders create solutions for today's challenges, while also growing their capacity to lead future endeavors from within.

Mindy has over 20 years of experience in organization and leadership development, and holds Masters Degrees in both Organization Development and Human Resources Management, and a Ph.D. in Human and Organization Systems. She is an accomplished speaker and published author, whose work appears in *The Competency Casebook* from HRD Press and *OD Practicing*.

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