

ARE YOU READY FOR THE FUTURE? THE VITAL NEED FOR LEADERSHIP TRAINING IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ERA



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Today's business environment needs a new generation of leaders.

Perhaps more than ever before, to succeed as a business leader today you must wear many hats and juggle many balls. You must adapt, innovate, pivot, communicate, leverage technology, and manage employees (in-office and remote), all while exuding confidence and empathy. You must keep an eye on the future and be willing to jettison outmoded strategies of the past that no longer work. You must establish and safeguard a workplace culture that is welcoming, diverse, and inclusive. Oh, and your business needs to turn a profit.

Very few executives innately know how to do all this at once, but with professional training they can get there. To survive and thrive now and in the years to come, it has become apparent that investing in leadership development is a necessary investment in your organization's future viability and success.

At SAMC, our specialty is developing the leaders of tomorrow.

For several years now, we have been providing Leadership Academies for clients, and as a result, are seeing enormous changes in their emerging leaders. Combining a monthly development initiative with individual coaching and a capstone team project is turning our clients' employees into better leaders, teammates and people. We watch with joy as many alumni of our programs move into key leadership positions and partnership roles. Their success is our success.

What do we do in our workshops? Primarily, we link ideas and insights with real-life situations that participants are dealing with. Each situation lends itself to multiple discussion points. It doesn't matter if we're focusing on emotional intelligence, leading versus managing, providing effective feedback, or teambuilding — all of our sessions tie together because they directly address real-world situations individuals are facing today. We have found that this type of active learning is very effective learning, and the ideas put forth are people's attempts to solve problems to get to a solution.

The times, they are a-changin'. We need to change with them.

Yes, change is hard — it's literally pain —but it's also exciting. It opens up new opportunities that can be very valuable for companies as they adopt new technologies, business models and staffing. Once you know how to do it, it becomes the way you do things, a beneficial habit built around the things you need to do to improve, adapt, innovate...and continuously thrive.

Two illustrative case studies

1. In one client session, participants struggled with introducing new processes and behaviors into their particular departments. Change requires behavior modification. Ideas are great, and vision is essential, but people come to work to "do something." Whether it was diabetes education programs, a hospital system, a clinic, or dealing with new doctors — the leadership team we were working with had to change the behavior of the staff they were managing. This is different from the tactical and practical things managers typically do.

This particular session focused on change and why our habits are so limiting and controlling. We worked with management on how to help others visualize, not just intellectualize, what had to change. We always preach that when you ask people to change their behavior, they need to "see" something before they can understand what you mean.

They then need help forming new habits, with repetition and positive reinforcement, to make them stick. Add a celebration for each small win, and change begins. We watched and listened as the program members began to initiate changes, and then watched those changes taking place effectively and quickly.

2. Another case involves a professional services firm with whom we have worked for several years. The personal development program we created for this client is slightly different from the one discussed above but equally relevant. The employees whom we are training serve clients and manage internal staff. When working with clients, they have discovered that the clients can only sometimes articulate what they want done. And, the information the firm needs from their clients to do the best job is not always clear. This communication gap has required the staff to adjust their listening skills, ask questions in a collaborative manner (“we” not “I”), and determine a) what is needed and b) how to get that from their clients.

In our ongoing work together, we talk about how to listen to hear what someone else is saying. Our session on conversational intelligence is always very in-depth because people don’t realize that it isn’t *what others say*, it’s *what we hear*. Our brains have only a few seconds to process what is being said. However, the firm’s team members often find themselves deep in a conversation with a client that may or may not be aligned with what the client really wanted to say or do, or what the firm needed to hear. This is when “deep listening” is essential. Fortunately, this is a skill that can be learned, as long as an individual understands what is happening during those conversations.

Eight essential tools for leaders to thrive in today’s business climate

The purpose of our Leadership Academies and personal development programs is to provide structure to the elusive thing we call “leadership.” Our clients realize that to be truly effective, leaders in this post-pandemic environment need to display mastery in eight key areas. How we design a training program is very important, because it must match the culture and specific needs of the organization. Here are some key areas we find necessary for leaders to successfully navigate the challenges and opportunities that have emerged in the last few years.

1. Out-of-the-box thinking is really building a new sandbox

When the best way forward is unclear, the most critical role of a leader is to leave the familiar. If that leader is you, you need to get out of your office and hang out with the folks you are supposed to lead. Unfamiliar times require unique solutions. Rather than thinking you have all the answers, you must be willing to search for the right ideas from the people who are looking to you to lead them. Don’t be afraid to ask for help — it really is a sign of strength. Don’t think you are just massaging the edges of your organization with out-of-the-box thinking. You may be building a new sandbox. Open your mind to what is possible to see what is happening around you.

2. Adaptability and resilience

The pandemic's effects on the workplace continue to reverberate from employees working remotely to ongoing supply chain issues to major shifts in B2B or consumer behavior. Leaders must be prepared to pivot quickly in response to unexpected challenges, such as managing remote teams who may not collaborate well, keeping up to speed with the latest digital tools, or reworking business strategies to meet ever-changing consumer and supplier demands.

3. Crisis management and risk assessment

Smart, solid leaders must be able to anticipate potential risks, create contingency plans, and lead their teams through difficult situations. Leadership training builds these crisis management skills so those in charge can confidently make tough decisions, communicate effectively during crises, and lead with empathy and insight. Often, planning on detours and "Plan B's" provides a way to anticipate the unexpected and get people ready to redirect and reframe situations as they are happening.

4. Bold embrace of innovation

Innovation is often the key to a business's success or failure. Business leaders need to establish a culture of innovation within their organization, and this does not mean just giving lip service. The entire organization must commit to a new way of operating, which sometimes means letting go of "the way we have always done things." Leadership training develops creative problem-solving skills and fosters an agile mindset that embraces change as an opportunity for growth. One of our favorite programs is about solving complex problems. At times, it is another way to foster innovative idea generation.

5. Ability to lead remote teams and communicate virtually

The pandemic accelerated the shift toward remote work and digital technologies, and there's no going back. Some firms are trying to rebuild their culture to ensure people come into an office at least several days a week. But the genie's out of the bottle. Employees, not employers, now dictate how, when, and where they want to work. They choose which organization they want to work for based on how well it aligns with their personal values and sense of purpose. This means leaders not only need to be proficient in managing remote teams and mastering digital tools, they also must be able to communicate effectively with remote teams, which for many people requires specific training.

6. Commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)

Today's leaders must be 100% committed to DEI principles and practices. Through personal example, they must set the standard for the company. Rather than delegate, they themselves must create inclusive workplaces, expose and eradicate bias, and require all

employees to respect their fellow workers from diverse backgrounds and different points of view. They should also invest in company-wide training in DEI to truly bring about an inclusive environment if it doesn't already exist.

7. Emphasis on mental health and well-being

The pandemic has taken a huge toll on mental health, and employees are not exempt from this. Leadership training teaches managers and department heads how to support employees' well-being, recognize signs of burnout, and promote a healthy work-life balance. Leaders who prioritize mental health will see as a result a more engaged, resilient, productive workforce. How they deliver this promise is not as straightforward as it might appear. Innovative firms are finding unexpected ways to encourage employee well-being. Look at your own organization. Do you have walking paths so people can find a way to stretch their legs and clear their minds? Are there meditation rooms where people can quietly escape from their desks and screens? Try to see how to encourage well-being through daily gratitude diaries.

8. Global perspective

A leader in this current economy has to be able to see the world in its entirety and have a keen understanding of how international events can impact their organization. Leadership training provides insights into global trends, cross-cultural communication and international market performance.

In today's volatile, fast-changing world, leadership training is not a luxury but a necessity

There's an old Icelandic proverb: "A wise man changes his mind, a fool never will." Uncertain times require businesses and their leaders to stay nimble, agile and adaptive. Changes will always be coming at you, sometimes fast, sometimes really fast (like today). Strong leaders must assess what these changes mean for their organization and how they are going to adjust, even capitalize on them. Sometimes this requires big changes. As we always say to our clients, don't waste a crisis. A good leader doesn't.

For more on leadership training, here are some of our most relevant podcasts and blogs

Podcasts

- [Sara Canaday—Can You See The Gaps That Are Holding You Back From Being A Great Leader?](#)
- [Danielle Grant—Authentic, Ethical, Caring And More Effective Leadership](#)
- [Kimberly Davis—Leading Change: Are You A Brave Leader?](#)

Blogs

- [How To Be A Highly Effective Leader During Turbulent Times: The Five Things You Need To Know](#)
- [Best Tips And Tricks For Women To Work In Male-Dominated Industries](#)
- [Okay, Okay, I'm Ready To Change. How Do I Do It?](#)

Could your organization benefit from better-trained leaders?

At [Simon Associates Management Consultants](#), we are [leadership specialists](#). In collaboration with our clients, we have crafted several types of leadership development programs — Leadership Academies — and individualized coaching programs. Some are full-year programs; others are multi-day retreats. Many are virtual or hybrids with some in-person sessions. Clients' specific needs guide us as we customize a program for their current and future leaders. Within each program, we also focus on followership since impactful, influential leaders are only effective if they can inspire others to follow them. Could we be of help your organization? [Please contact us](#). We'd love to start a conversation.

About Andi Simon



[Andrea \(Andi\) Simon, Ph.D.](#), [corporate anthropologist](#), [author](#), and executive coach founded [Simon Associates Management Consultants](#) (SAMC) over two decades ago to bring the unique perspective of anthropology to businesses and organizations that need or want to change. As a [culture change expert](#) and trained practitioner in [Blue Ocean Strategy](#)®, she helps a diverse range of organizations “see, feel and think” in new ways, finding better solutions for their current customers and “big ideas” to attract future ones. [Contact SAMC](#) to find out how Andi and her team can help your organization drive change, overcome challenges and reach your potential for success. Subscribe to Andi's podcast: [On the Brink with Andi Simon](#) and hear how you can move off the brink and soar!

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Andi has authored two award-winning books: [On the Brink: A Fresh Lens to Take Your Business to New Heights](#) and [Rethink: Smashing the Myths of Women in Business](#). Her third book, [Women Mean Business: Over 500 Insights from Extraordinary Leaders to Spark Your Success](#), co-authored with Edie Fraser and Robyn Freedman Spizman, is being called the women's business book of the decade. To order your copies, click on the images below:

