



# Book Leaders as Teachers

## Unlock the Teaching Potential of Your Company's Best and Brightest

Edward Betof  
ASTD Publications, 2009  
Listen now

- play
- pause

00:00  
00:00

### Recommendation

The best football teams do not park their star players on the bench. Your top executives are your star players. Now, make them play ball: Deploy their expertise by involving them in teaching and training. Learning expert Edward Betof describes how companies can create “leaders-as-teachers” programs, sharing the knowledge of their senior executives, top managers and in-house experts, and, thus, fully benefiting from their top people’s expertise and savvy. Having served for 10 years as chief learning officer for Becton, Dickinson and Company, a leading medical technology company, Betof speaks with an insider’s informed perspective. He made this program work in the trenches. *BooksInShort* believes his book is well suited for learning and development officers, and for others who want to put teaching and learning at the core of their companies’ success.

### Take-Aways

- Leverage the knowledge and expertise of your company’s leaders to educate, train and develop your employees with a “leaders-as-teachers” program.
- Benefits include well-prepared workers, reduced costs, improved profits and stronger leadership skills.
- Leaders who volunteer to teach derive as much benefit as their students.
- A leaders-as-teachers program strengthens your corporate culture, helps mold a learning environment and promotes positive organizational change.
- Your program must have the support of your company’s top executives.
- Make executives’ participation a requirement for advancement.
- Employees may resist a leaders-as-teachers program because it involves change.
- Put the right leaders in place. Match their courses to their expertise, prepare them to teach, boost their confidence and design an engaging program.
- Appropriate teaching tools include “case studies,” “story telling” and “mini-lectures.”
- Design your program to focus on content, useful information and professional growth.

### Summary

#### BD University: Where Leaders Teach

In 1999, senior executives at Becton, Dickinson and Company (BD), a medical technology firm, faced a major challenge. To meet their future objectives for the company, these leaders realized they had to “spend more time developing people” with enhanced training. That meant increasing their executives’ capabilities and mustering them as volunteer teachers.

"I learn from teaching, and I think it has made me a better communicator of our strategies." (Edward J. Ludwig, CEO, Becton, Dickinson and Company)

The firm committed to transforming itself into "a teaching organization and a learning organization." In 2000, Edward J. Ludwig, an enthusiastic proponent of this new venture, became the company's CEO. He and his executive team planned and developed a new "face-to-face learning" program. Its crown jewel, BD University (BDU), teaches sales, leadership, "business skills" and "operational effectiveness," among other subjects. More than 500 of the firm's executives have earned certification as "leader-teachers," and more than 50,000 students have received training. Teaching methods vary from classroom sessions to various "technology-enabled resources." This "leaders-as-teachers" approach makes sense for any firm for six reasons:

1. **"Helping to drive business results"** – Leader-as-teacher learning programs align their content with a company's business goals and outcomes.
2. **"Stimulating the learning and development of leaders and associates"** – Having senior leaders serve as role models builds everyone's capabilities. Employees can create networks and try new "skills and behaviors" without worrying about failure.
3. **"Improving the...skills of those who teach"** – Executives who teach others sharpen their teaching and leadership skills, and build expertise about their specialty areas.
4. **"Strengthening organizational culture and communications"** – Leaders who teach exemplify the corporate culture and demonstrate what the firm expects from its personnel.
5. **"Promoting positive business and organizational change"** – This helps staffers prepare for change by teaching organizational design and change management.
6. **"Reducing cost by leveraging top talent"** – This program is cost-effective.

"Being taught by respected leaders is often a compelling experience that frequently influences others to join the process."

Becton, Dickinson's university has taught 2,000 students the "eight-step model of change" written by John Kotter of Harvard Business School. His step-by-step change management strategy can help your leaders-as-teachers program overcome the usual organizational resistance to new ideas. The status quo exerts tremendous pull. Push back with these eight measures:

1. **"Establish a sense of urgency"** – BD's executives understood that their competitors were developing superior training. They had to catch up fast. Like BD, your company can use this program to address "crises, potential crises or major opportunities."
2. **"Create the guiding coalition"** – Recruit a leadership group with sufficient clout to institute notable change, and help them coalesce as a model team.
3. **"Develop a vision and strategy"** – Know what you want to achieve and how you're going to do it. Prepare alternatives to use if your initial implementation plan fails.
4. **"Communicate the change vision"** – Deploy every possible communication channel. BD's executives met with large and small groups to explain the new program.
5. **"Empower broad-based action"** – Urge employees to take risks and to generate new, unconventional "ideas, activities and actions." Eliminate any obstacles in their path.
6. **"Generate short-term wins"** – "Plan for visible improvements in performance" and celebrate new achievements.
7. **"Consolidate the gains"** – Use the momentum to create additional change.
8. **"Anchor new approaches in the culture"** – The success of your program depends more on who teaches in it than on what material they cover. Make the program integral to the company's personality and general approach to learning.

## Getting Leaders Involved

Leaders can volunteer to participate in several ways. Working individually or in teams, they can target the firm's specific educational needs and design program components to fulfill them. They can leverage their expertise to plan and develop appropriate programs, serve as sounding boards on content concepts, and review courses and instructional formats and methods. They also can recruit, mentor or coach new leader-teachers. And, of course, they can instruct. To help your executive teachers convey their ideas about leadership, strategy and priorities, provide them with high-tech equipment and access to a variety of communication outlets. Then train them well.

"Leaders with a proven track record of success take direct responsibility for the development of other leaders." (Noel Tichy, author of *The Leadership Engine*)

Set your leaders up to succeed as instructors by giving them a good background in "teaching, coaching and mentoring skills." Great leaders are made, not born. To make your program viable, you must put the right leaders in place. Your success depends on the quality of the leader-teachers you recruit and how you utilize them. Follow these four principles:

1. **"Match teaching assignments with the leader's background, expertise, responsibilities and interests"** – Once you have the right people, boost their confidence and enthusiasm by matching them with subjects they want to teach. Recognize their work, offer professional support and be sure the courses fit their schedules. Plan ahead.
2. **"Make sure leaders are well prepared to teach"** – Institute a teacher training process so your instructors know what they are doing. "Train-the-trainer" sessions work best with groups of five to twelve people.
3. **"Leaders should teach at the level of their confidence and effectiveness"** – To increase instructors' confidence, have them progress from simple assignments to more challenging ones. For example, a new teacher can begin by introducing a speaker.
4. **"Use active teaching and training methods in program design"** – Thoroughly involve participants in the training. Encourage them to "do most of the work."

"Senior leaders and other high influencers frequently are factors in achieving the necessary leverage that can convert your efforts from quick wins into sustained adoption."

Students also benefit when leaders co-teach courses. Teachers who work in pairs can give each other feedback and back each other up in case of an emergency.

Executive vice president John Hanson works with individual students before his formal leadership development classes. He is always searching for potential future leaders. Many BDU leader-teachers also coach students after program sessions to help them retain information they shared in class. Make the most of “peer teaching and peer coaching,” which allow you to leverage staffers’ knowledge and your leaders’ expertise. Urge students to participate in study groups of two to six people.

“Teaching organizations are more agile, come up with better strategies and are able to implement them more effectively.” (Tichy)

**Effective teachers often use these tools and methods:**

- **“Storytelling”** – To win people’s minds, first win their hearts with stories.
- **“Problem solving”** – Engage participants in tackling real business problems.
- **“Case studies, exercises and simulations”** – The Harvard Business School uses case studies as the foundation of its business classes.
- **“Town meetings”** – To make mass sessions valuable, focus on interactivity.
- **“Mini-lectures”** – Never talk more than 15 to 20 minutes in an “uninterrupted” flow.
- **“Learning journals”** – Encourage participants to use journals to detail their insights and reflections on the course material.
- **“Media and technology”** – Use webcasts and podcasts as high-tech teaching tools.
- **“Debriefs”** – Review the “learning gems” you want participants to take with them.

“Winning organizations use learning, teaching, coaching and mentoring in ways that their competition does not.”

Avoid “death by PowerPoint,” and focus on engaging students with “active teaching” that captures their attention. Becton, Dickinson relies on the work of organizational behavior expert Noel Tichy, who developed the leaders-as-teachers concept. Tichy, author of *The Leadership Engine* and *The Cycle of Leadership*, emphasizes sharing “Teachable Points of View” based on a leader’s business experience. Tichy urges leader-teachers to explain the context of the information they present and to keep their lessons and business practices consistent. He says leader-teachers should cultivate informed viewpoints on various matters, such as “ethics,” “execution,” “individual and team effectiveness” and ways to succeed in business. He says that the best executive teachers are engaging, active listeners and knowledgeable, interactive presenters.

**Getting Leaders to Participate**

BD’s leaders-as-teachers program is based on its goal of offering “continuous learning,” an ambition that the CEO supports. As you work to get everyone’s support and participation, enlisting the CEO is crucial. When you get the senior management team to support your leaders-as-teachers program, everyone else will also. To encourage up-and-coming managers to teach, make participation a requirement for promotion. Involving leaders and learners from throughout the organization also helps break down silos by spurring the free flow of information.

“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.” (John F. Kennedy)

To strengthen your new program, align its content and strategies with your company’s business goals. Give your managers and executives a variety of ways to participate. Try to make your program “highly satisfying,” so that your leaders find teaching energizing. Keep your logistics simple and accessible, and “emphasize the value of teaching” when you evaluate a manager’s leadership potential.

“Teaching is the highest form of understanding.” (Aristotle)

To ensure that your program runs smoothly, think of program design as a structured process. The “Three-Level Program Design Model” suggests that you focus on three factors:

1. The content of your curriculum.
2. The importance and utility of the information to the student.
3. How participants can apply the information to grow professionally.

“Success is never final.” (Winston Churchill)

The central issues that will emerge as you tackle the administrative work of setting up and designing your leaders-as-teachers program include:

- **“How does governance affect the leaders-as-teachers process?”** – Very much. Be sure that you align your program and its strategy with your business goals. Everyone should agree on a management plan and on the needed investment of time, money and expertise.
- **“What role do learning professionals play?”** – Your program needs the input of professionals with experience in “adult learning theory, leadership development, change leadership, instructional design” and “instructional technology.”
- **“What are the logistics of the implementation process?”** – Training coordinators work with the participants to make your program a success. They perform numerous functions, including developing “learning management systems.”
- **“Why is advanced and reliable scheduling important?”** – You must plan each increment of your program in advance, since your volunteer leader-teachers first must handle their executive responsibilities.
- **“Why is it important to contract with leader-teachers?”** – Having a formal contract commits executives to the program and the parts they will play.
- **“How do program champions assist?”** – These facilitators ensure that the leaders-as-teachers program supports the company’s goals and strategy. They help train administrators and instructors to maintain the program’s high quality.
- **“How do you manage vendor selection and relationships?”** – Avoid vendors who do not fully support your leaders-as-teachers program, such as those who erect software-licensing barriers. Seek suppliers who are ready to “help certify and train leader-teachers.”

“The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now.” (Chinese proverb)

To keep your organization fresh and invigorated, dedicate it to teaching and training.

## About the Author

**Edward Betof** is the director of the University of Pennsylvania's doctoral program for chief learning officers. He was vice president and chief learning officer at Becton, Dickinson and Company, and a member of the American Society for Training and Development board.

---

---