

Why creating a learning culture at work is crucial to business development

 By [Brian Eagar](#)

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Just for a minute, think about someone that you really enjoy spending time with. Besides their obvious likable character traits such as friendliness, wit and warmth, chances are you probably enjoy spending time with them because they have something valuable to share. Oftentimes, that "something" causes you to leave the conversation feeling inspired, energised or simply with food for thought that lingers long after the time spent in each other's company. These conversations could take place with a family member, a trusted friend, a co-worker and hopefully your leader.



Warren Buffett says clever people know their field because they studied it, but smart people are intentional about investing in continuous learning. His formula for success is: "Go to bed smarter than you woke up". Learning inspires and supports personal development and ultimately your purpose. When you learn, you obtain knowledge and gain insight. By putting your knowledge into practice over time, you build wisdom. Wisdom in turn builds trust, builds relationships and attracts followers.

Leading by example to foster a learning culture in your business therefore begins with intrinsic motivation i.e. a true desire to learn that comes from within yourself. Learning, and lifelong learning in particular, is a process that requires patience, humility and curiosity.

“ As a leader, the responsibility to inspire a culture of learning in your organisation, and also to empower your employees to do so, lies with you. ”

In the workplace, there is ample opportunity to glean valuable insights from both older, more experienced leaders and younger, technology savvy and wise millennials. In the context of learning, age is literally just a number. Like anthropologists that probe deeper to find connections between the past and the present, leaders can facilitate a proverbial meeting of young and old minds, and foster a connection between purpose and results, if they are willing to adapt a learning mindset themselves. In this way, learning to learn about the business takes place as a team, unhindered by ego and pride and consequently also narrows the generation gap.

With the upsurge of millennials entering the workforce, it is essential that leaders broaden their thinking in terms of how they expect their employees to learn. To remain competitive in an ever-changing business landscape, business leaders must adopt flexible strategies that allow for learning how to do the work better while doing the work i.e. learning and improving as you go. Also, by investing in your employees and encouraging them to take responsibility for their learning journey, you build your talent pipeline to ensure that you have future leaders that can transfer knowledge and move the business forward.

In our current global economic climate, and with the rapid rise of Artificial Intelligence, building, maintaining and supporting a culture of learning is no longer a nice to have – it's urgent and essential if you want your business and its individual team members to both survive and thrive. Brands like Kodak, Nokia, Blockbuster, Yahoo and Hummer are dire examples of the impact of being resistant or unprepared for change. Leaders must adapt and find creative ways to switch their employees on when it comes to learning.

When employees are inspired to learn by your example and through your encouragement, they are much more likely to retain what they learn. Neuroscience tells us that the brain needs to be “switched on” to learn. When we are engaged positively, a hormone called oxytocin is released which helps us be more in tune with what is happening around us and more open to participate. Ultimately, if the experience is positive, employees will then become motivated by their own development and motivate others in turn.

On the other hand, we can also do great damage when we engage others in a negative manner, or even when we neglect to engage them at all. The stress hormone (cortisol) is released when we are switched off (disengaged). This could be because we are disinterested or because we have been engaged in a manner that induces stress (e.g. by a condescending or impatient teacher), or being busy and overwhelmed.

Investing in a culture of learning is a powerful tool that will help you face the business challenges that lie ahead. Ultimately, high performing teams consist of employees that are engaged and committed to achieving success. When leaders are lifelong learners themselves and continuously investigate opportunities and new methods of learning to encourage their employees to learn and grow to the benefit of themselves and the organisation, a high performing organisation will be the end result.

ABOUT BRIAN EAGAR

Brian Eagar is the founder and group CEO of TowerStone. From being voted as the naughtiest kid most likely to fail at school, Eagar found success in the information and technology sector as a young sales and marketing executive, culminating in an executive sales and strategy role for one of the Siemens businesses based in Germany. On his return to South Africa, his passion to inspire leadership led to the creation of TowerStone Leadership Centre in 2006.

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