

TIP #22 – September 2007
THE TALENT MYTH
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There is increasing evidence that “talent” is highly over-rated. Simply hiring the best talent and letting them loose to do their jobs is **not** the formula for success. Instead, evidence on expert performance is showing us that the key to becoming exemplary in anything— whether it’s music, sports, medicine, or leadership—is directly related to how much people engage in disciplined practice. Those who engage in more disciplined practice are higher performers than those who are engaged in less practice.

It’s time for those in leadership development to take a stand! Instead of accepting the notion that shorter is better, we need to speak the truth and focus our organizations and clients on the fact that those who become the best at anything are those who spend more time, not less, on their growth and development.

We, as leadership development professionals, are critical to bringing out the leader in everyone. Our work can play a pivotal role in getting organizations and individuals to increase the amount of time and attention that is paid to this practice.

Whether working with clients in coaching or training environments, here are several techniques to keep people focused and engaged in the practice of leadership:

- Get a baseline assessment of how your clients are performing on solid measures of leadership behavior, using the *Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)*, for example
- Set very specific goals for improvement
- Engage in designed learning activities that focus on these established goals
- In those designed learning experiences, concentrate on technique as much as outcome
- Offer immediate feedback on how well your clients are performing
- Help your clients identify ways to ‘practice’ at least 2 hours each day while engaged in the normal routines of business
- Repeat, repeat, and repeat.

There is a caveat, however. Unless we really love something, we don’t tend to want to put in the practice in order to improve or to excel at what we are trying to do. That applies as much to leadership as it does to engineering, medicine, or teaching. Clients won’t expend the energy it takes to master leadership unless they love it. Fortunately, HR has a critical part to play in helping clients see and appreciate how important leaders are to group or team performance and how rewarding it can be when they are truly doing their best and performing at the highest possible levels. Coaches, trainers, and HR professionals at all levels can make the critical difference between good performance and great performance.