



## **Making the Case for Leadership Development – When Should Leadership Development Begin?**

I'd like you to think for a moment about the next airline flight you're going to take.

Would you get onto that aircraft if you knew the captain sitting in the cockpit, the one who is about to fly the aircraft for the next 3, 4 or even more hours to your destination, had only taken a three day course in flying?

Or what about the emergency surgery you have to undergo? What would be your thoughts if the anesthetist tells you just before the anesthetic begins to take effect, that the surgeon hasn't completed specialist training?

Of course, hypothetical - and ridiculous - questions. We expect that before either of these professionals – in whose hands we place our lives – have undergone thousands of hours of training, and many of those hours 'on the job' supervised, before they can be given the responsibility they have.

But what about leaders? Sure, most of them aren't making 'life-critical' decisions as a pilot or surgeon would have to make, often in a split-second, but their actions, behaviors – and the decisions they make – impacts on lives significantly.

Leaders behaviors impact not only on those in their immediate sphere of influence such as those they are leading either in a small team or a larger corporation, depending on their leadership influence but in so many cases, their own country and even the influence they may have globally.

Pilot training can start at an early age. In many countries, students of flying can gain a license to fly before they're old enough to qualify for a license to drive a car. Then years of training follows. With the ongoing training and simulator checking that airline pilots are required to do, pilots embark on career-long learning.

Surgeons also follow a rigorous path of learning before they become the highly respected, life-saving denizens of the operating theatre.

But what at what age, typically, does the training for those who are going to impact our lives in so many ways, who are entrusted with achieving the very best corporate results, who are responsible for leading teams, companies, organizations, even countries begin?

Certainly, for some, it begins young. For the fortunate ones, that is – fortunate for them and for those they're leading.

Research shows that the average age that leadership training begins is ....42.

Surprised? I was. The aircraft has already taken off. The patient is under the anesthetic.

The impact of this is compounded by a recent survey<sup>1</sup> in which respondents were asked if they think there is a leadership crisis in the world today.

A staggering 86% said there was.

In another 2015 survey<sup>2</sup> when asked if companies were worried about their leadership pipeline, again, 86% said they were 'seriously' worried .

So when should we start leadership development?

In a survey conducted in 2012<sup>3</sup>, 97% of employers stated that leadership development should start not at the current age of 42 but at 21.

In the work that Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner have done in researching leadership over the last 35 years, they show that one of the fundamental of leadership is that leadership is everyone's business.

Typically, organizations only offer opportunities for leadership development for those who have moved up in the organization and now 'need' leadership development when, in reality, the individual and therefore the entire organization will benefit significantly when leadership development starts early.

I say 'starts early' because leadership development isn't a '2 or 3 day-course-and- you're-done'.

Another fundamental to leadership identified by Jim and Barry in The Leadership Challenge<sup>4</sup>, is just like the airline pilot's training, leadership requires ongoing, deliberate practice.

So what age are you going to start developing your leaders?

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1. Source: Outlook on the Global Agenda 2015, World Economic Forum.

2. Source: *Global Human Capital Trends 2015*, Deloitte.
3. Source: Center for Creative Leadership, *2012 Leadership Insights Survey*
4. *The Leadership Challenge*, James Kouzes and Barry Posner – 2012, 6<sup>th</sup> Ed, Publisher: John Wiley