

**The Human Capital Advantage: A Curriculum for Early Stage Ventures**

**Module Four: Learning and Development**

**Introduction/Value Proposition**

Investing in learning and development from the start can give your firm a competitive advantage, helping you attract and retain a great team. Developing a learning culture and cross training employees can enable your company to continuously improve in a fast changing global market. Ensuring that employees have communication and conflict management skills and giving them frequent feedback will help both individual employees and the company as a whole learn and develop.

**Goals/Desired Outcomes**

After this module, entrepreneurs should be able to articulate some strategies for developing a culture of learning and continuous improvement, including:

* Cross training
* Creating high performing teams
* Giving and receiving feedback
* Communication and conflict management
* Performance management

**Advance Prep**

Send around the articles below, emphasizing the importance of the pre-work.

**See PowerPoint for presentation/exercise content:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **TIME** | **TOPIC** | **MATERIALS** |
| 15 min | Introduction to the module/goals of day | PPT, laptop, projector |
| 20 min | The importance of investing in learning and development: check in/theory/slides/discussion |  |
| 15 min | Cross training: check in/theory/slides/discussion |  |
| 15 min | High performing teams: check in/theory/slides/discussion |  |
| 15 min | Communication: check in/theory/slides/discussion |  |
| 15 min | *Communication/conflict management exercise* |  |
| 15 min | Performance management: check in/theory/slides/discussion |  |
| 15 min | *Use Leveling Up Handout to think about what employees will need to know and how culture can help leverage that – 5 minutes for handout, 5 minute discussion* | Handout |
| 10 min | Wrap up, key take-aways, evaluation | Evaluation form |
| **135 min (2 hrs 15 min)** |  |  |

**Exercises**

* Communication/conflict management skills – distribute blank paper if needed

**Follow Up/Measure progress**

Check in after a month, six months, a year on progress

**Resources to distribute ahead of time**

*NOTE TO PARTICIPANTS: This pre-work (reviewing these materials) will take you about 30-60 minutes and will enable you to participate at a much higher level.*

* Inc. [5 Reasons You Should Be Investing in Employee Development](http://www.inc.com/chad-halvorson/5-reasons-you-should-be-investing-in-employee-development.html)
* Length: Short online article
* Summary: Investing time and money in employee development from the beginning of your business can be a competitive advantage.
* Relevance for early stage entrepreneurs: High
* Specific take-aways: Having a good development program brings in good people, builds loyalty, and builds your reputation as a good employer. It helps you develop employees for future promotion and continuous learning, and it encourages you to look to the future to think about what kind of employees/leaders/skills you will need as your business develop.
* Inc.: [5 Keys to Building a Learning Organization](http://www.forbes.com/sites/joshbersin/2012/01/18/5-keys-to-building-a-learning-organization/#77b481094218)
* Length: Short online article
  + Summary: Companies are realizing that that investing in training and development is key to ensuring employees’ skills are current.
* Relevance for early stage entrepreneurs: High
  + Specific take-aways: The five keys to success in building a learning organization are: create an environment that supports rapid on-the-job learning, promote and reward expertise, create ways for people to share their expertise, incentivize any necessary formal training, and create a culture where it is safe to make mistakes and learn from them.
* Forbes: [5 Keys of Dealing with Workplace Conflict](http://www.forbes.com/sites/mikemyatt/2012/02/22/5-keys-to-dealing-with-workplace-conflict/#3e6f768a15a0)
  + Length: medium length online article
  + Summary: Conflict in the workplace is unavoidable, and conflict often escalates if not dealt with. Fear of conflict is common but not useful. Good leaders know how to recognize it and resolve it quickly, resulting in healthier workplaces and greater employee engagement and retention. The root of most conflict is either poor communication or poorly controlled emotions.
  + Relevance for early stage entrepreneurs: High
  + Specific take-aways: Define acceptable behavior, create a framework for decision making, and have clear job descriptions. Identify potential sources of tension and deal with conflict head-on and in a timely fashion. Approach conflict from the perspective of taking the action that will help others best achieve their goals. Pick your battles and avoid conflict for the sake of conflict. But leverage conflict for team building and leadership development purposes -- different perspectives can leverage innovation in ways that those thinking alike could not achieve.
* Inc. Magazine: [Building and Leading High Performance Teams](http://www.inc.com/resources/leadership/articles/20070101/musselwhite.html)
  + Length: short online article
  + Summary: The ability to build and lead high performing teams is especially critical in startups and small businesses where people must work closely together, wear many hats, and work effectively across the organization to get tasks accomplished quickly.
  + Relevance for early stage entrepreneurs: High
  + Specific take-aways: The team leader must be able to help the group understand its shared goals and what each person brings, ensure the team has adequate information, and facilitate effective interaction. The team needs timely feedback and a safe environment to quickly admit mistakes and correct them.
* Buffer Open: [We Don’t Have Performance Reviews at Our Startup: Here’s What We Do Instead](https://open.buffer.com/coaching/)
  + Length: Short online article with a few imbedded videos
  + Summary: Many companies are doing away with annual reviews and replacing them with weekly feedback sessions driven by the employee rather than the manager.
  + Relevance for early stage entrepreneurs: High
  + Specific take-aways: Early on Buffer began one-on-one sessions between every teammate and their team lead at least every 2 weeks. They generally last about an hour and include time for achievements, challenges, and feedback from the team lead to the teammate. Buffer also has periodic peer-to-peer sessions called masterminds to celebrate successes and discuss challenges.
* The Hitachi Foundation: [Business Action Guide: Peer Reviews: Optimax](http://www.hitachifoundation.org/storage/documents/Optimax_Peer_Reviews.pdf)
  + Length: 2-3 page article
  + Summary: Receiving feedback from peers – in addition to a supervisor – allows employees to understand how their effectiveness is viewed by others, as well as reinforcing skills and behaviors needed in the organization to accomplish its mission, vision, and goals.
  + Relevance for early stage entrepreneurs: High
  + Specific take-aways: Use peer reviews as a chance to provide coaching; link reviews to ongoing career goals paired with training and development opportunities; use metrics to guide performance.