

RYP Quarterly

See One. Do One. Teach One.

Why Leaders Must Ditch the Training Myth
and Embrace a Learning Cycle

By David Stewart



RYP QUARTERLY

There's a quiet but costly myth embedded in many organisations: that training equals learning.

Send people to a workshop, bring in a keynote, roll out an online module, tick the box, and assume capability has improved. It hasn't. At best, you've created awareness. At worst, you've created the illusion of progress.

If we're serious about developing leaders, coaches, and high-performing teams, we need to challenge this mindset head-on. Because learning (real, applied, behaviour-changing learning) doesn't happen through consumption. It happens through experience, ownership, and contribution. That's where the deceptively simple model "see one, do one, teach one" becomes not just relevant, but essential.

Originating in medical training, this approach has produced generations of professionals capable of performing under pressure, making complex decisions, and continuously improving. It's time leaders borrowed it, and more importantly, endorsed it through how they lead, not just what they say.

THE TRAINING MYTH: WHY INFORMATION ISN'T TRANSFORMATION

Let's start by calling it out. Most organisational "learning" is front-loaded and passive:

- Workshops full of ideas but light on application.
- Leadership programs disconnected from real work and obsessed with competency training.
- Online modules completed for compliance, not capability.
- Conferences that inspire for a day, then disappear into the noise

This model assumes that if people hear something valuable, they will do something differently. No, they won't. Adult learning doesn't work like that. Adults don't learn by being told. They learn by:



**Yet many organisations still treat learning as an event, rather than a process.
The result? Knowledge without behaviour change. Insight without impact.**

The Medical Model: Learning Under Pressure

In medicine, there's no room for this disconnect. The "see one, do one, teach one" model exists because it must. The stakes demand it. A trainee doesn't just attend a lecture on a procedure. They:

1. **See one** – observe it in context
2. **Do one** – perform it under supervision
3. **Teach one** – pass it on, reinforcing their own understanding

This cycle is fast, practical, and grounded in reality. But more importantly, it embeds three critical elements of learning:

- **Application** (you must act)
- **Accountability** (your actions have consequences)
- **Reflection** (you must make sense of what happened)

That's why it works. And that's exactly what's missing in many leadership and coaching environments.

THE SHIFT LEADERS MUST MAKE: FROM TRAINING TO LEARNING

If leaders want different outcomes, they must shift their mindset from delivering training to **designing learning ecosystems**. This is not semantics. It's a fundamental **change in approach**.

- **Training says:** "We've told you what to do."
- **Learning says:** "We've created the conditions for you to improve."

The difference lies in what happens after the content is delivered. Leaders who embrace a learning mindset ask:

- Where will people apply this?
- How will they practise it?
- Who will support them?
- How will they reflect on it?
- When will they teach it to others?

Without these elements, development stalls.

"SEE ONE": THE POWER OF OBSERVATION WHEN DONE PROPERLY:

Observation is often undervalued or poorly executed. We assume that exposure equals understanding. It doesn't. Watching a great leader handle a difficult conversation, run a meeting, or navigate a crisis is only useful if it's intentional. Leaders must frame observation:

- What should people be looking for?
- What does good look like?
- What decisions are being made in the moment?
- What trade-offs are occurring?

Without this clarity, observation becomes passive, and passive learning rarely sticks. Done well, however, "see one" builds awareness and creates a reference point for action.

“DO ONE”: WHERE LEARNING GETS REAL

This is where most organisations fall down. The leap from knowing to doing is uncomfortable. It involves risk. It exposes gaps. It invites failure. So, we avoid it. We keep people in workshops. We simulate scenarios. We delay real responsibility. But here’s the truth: **confidence doesn’t come before action; it comes from it.**

Experiential learning (the “do one” phase) is where capability is built. For leaders, this means having the tough conversation, not just discussing how to have it, or making decisions with incomplete information, or leading initiatives where outcomes are uncertain, or taking ownership of results, good or bad. For sports coaches, it means trying new approaches in live environments, or adjusting strategies in real time, or giving immediate, honest feedback

This is where empowerment becomes tangible. **Empowerment isn’t soft; it’s structural.** Empowerment is often misunderstood as encouragement or autonomy. In reality, it’s structural. People feel empowered when:

- They are trusted with meaningful responsibility
- They are allowed to make decisions
- They experience the consequences of those decisions
- They are supported to reflect and improve

You cannot have empowerment without accountability. They are two sides of the same coin. The “do one” phase forces this. It creates a direct link between action and outcome. And here’s the critical point: Leaders who shield their teams from consequences (who step in too early, who control too tightly) don’t create safety. They create dependency. The medical model doesn’t allow for this. At some point, the trainee must act. So must your people.

“TEACH ONE”: THE MOST OVERLOOKED LEVER IN LEARNING

If “do one” builds competence, “teach one” builds depth, confidence, and culture. Yet it’s the phase most organisations ignore. We assume that once someone can perform, the job is done. It’s not. Teaching transforms learning in three powerful ways:

1. It Deepens Understanding. Explaining something to another person forces clarity. You can’t hide behind vague concepts—you must make it make sense.

2. It Drives Reflection. Teaching prompts questions:

- Why does this work?
- When wouldn’t it work?
- How do I adapt this for someone else?

This reflection strengthens judgment.

3. It Embeds Application. When people teach what they’ve learned, they revisit and reinforce it. This dramatically improves retention and transfer. There’s a reason the old saying persists: “To teach is to learn twice.”

THE COACHING MINDSET: THE MISSING LINK

For this model to work, leaders must shift from being instructors to coaches. This is not about having all the answers. It's about creating the conditions for others to find them. A coaching mindset involves:

- Asking more than telling
- Listening more than directing
- Challenging constructively
- Allowing space for trial and error
- Supporting reflection

It also requires restraint. Leaders must resist the urge to step in too quickly, to solve problems on behalf of others, or to default to control. Instead, they must ask:

- What do you think?
- What options do you see?
- What will you try?
- What did you learn?

This is how “see one, do one, teach one” becomes embedded, not as a program, but as a way of operating.

MYTH BUSTING: WHAT ADULT LEARNING IS (AND ISN'T)

Let's challenge a few persistent myths.

Myth 1: People need more information to improve

Reality: Most people already know more than they apply.

Myth 2: Learning happens in formal settings

Reality: Most meaningful learning happens on the job, in real situations.

Myth 3: Failure should be minimised

Reality: Failure (when supported and reflected on) is one of the most powerful learning tools available.

Myth 4: Experts make the best teachers

Reality: Those closest to the learning journey often teach it best, because they understand the challenges.

Myth 5: Development is HR's responsibility

Reality: Development is a leadership responsibility. Culture is shaped by what leaders prioritise and role model.

BUILDING A LEARNING CULTURE: PRACTICAL STEPS

Embedding this model requires intention. Here's where leaders can start:

1. Design for Application. Every learning initiative should answer: Where will this be used immediately?

2. Create Real Opportunities to Act. Give people responsibility earlier. Trust them with meaningful work.

3. Normalise Teaching. Build peer learning into routines: Team debriefs. Knowledge-sharing sessions. Mentoring relationships

4. Prioritise Reflection After action, ask: What worked? What didn't? What will we do differently?

5. Recognise Behaviour, Not Attendance. Reward those who apply and share learning—not those who simply complete training.

THE LEADERSHIP IMPERATIVE: ENDORSE IT BY LIVING IT

None of this works unless leaders genuinely endorse it. Not in words, but in actions. If leaders default to control, avoid risk, punish failure, hoard knowledge, or prioritise short-term output over long-term growth ...then no learning model will take hold. But when leaders:

- Step back to allow others to step up
- Share their own learning openly
- Encourage experimentation
- Ask questions instead of giving answers
- Create space for teaching and reflection

Then they send a clear message: *learning matters here.*

And more importantly: *you are responsible for it.*

FROM CONSUMPTION TO CONTRIBUTION

At its core, “see one, do one, teach one” is about shifting identity. From passive participant to active contributor. From knowledge consumer to knowledge creator. From task executor to capability builder. This is where real development happens. Not in the comfort of theory, but in the tension of practice and the responsibility of helping others grow.

A FINAL THOUGHT

In a world moving faster than ever, the organisations and teams that thrive won't be those with the most training. They'll be the ones with the strongest learning cultures.

Cultures where:

People see what good looks like

Step forward and try

And share what they've learned

Over and over again.

Because learning isn't an event.

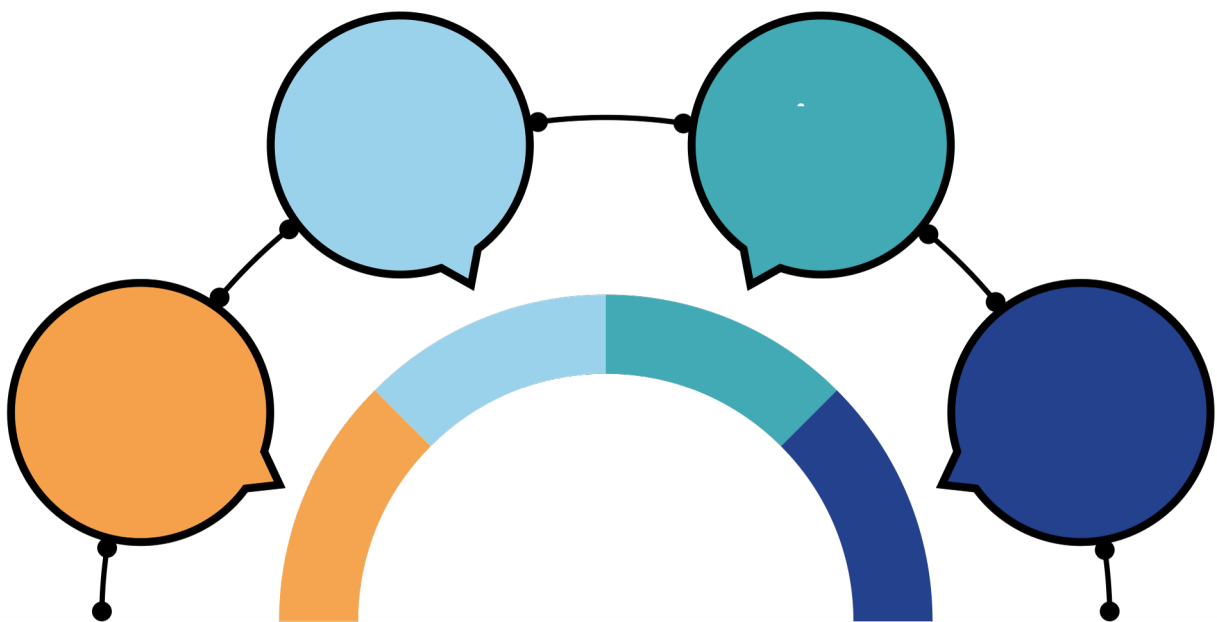
It's a cycle that loops

See one..... Do one..... Teach one.

Leadership Lesson:

If leaders are serious about growth, it's time to stop managing training and start leading learning.

Facta Non-Verba – Deeds Not Words



David Stewart is the Principal of RYP International and has been an international thought leader in Team Culture and High Performance for over 30 Years. He has a Masters in Business Leadership, a Bachelor of Education and a Graduate Diploma in Sports Science.

You can contact him via:

Email: dstewart@rypinternational

Website: www.rypinternational.com