Evolving Your TD Role as a C-Suite Trusted Advisor

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Elaine Biech
ebb associates inc
www.ebbweb.com
ebbiech@aol.com

Author of
The Art and Science of Training
The Washington Post
#1 Bestseller Nonfiction
Talent Development is Evolving
Your Job is Too

The Workplace of the Future
An incredible number of pressures are placed on organizations today: rapid technological changes; new, tougher competition; a demographically changing workforce; increased globalization; higher customer expectations; greater employee expectations; a constantly increasing rate of change. Every one of these pressures faced by your organization requires the attention of talent development professionals.

Where there are new challenges, there is a need for new knowledge and skills. And that’s the role of the talent development professional. As a trusted advisor to your senior leadership team, you will collect information to keep them informed of the ever changing world; coach them about implementing AI, robotics, and AR; and consult with them about how talent development (TD) can achieve the organization’s strategic imperative.

What About You?
Are you asking: Will I have a job in five years? Will I be replaced by a machine? Will I have a robot for a boss? Will I talk to computers all day? You can sense these underlying concerns in many articles and blog posts. Research shows that almost 50 percent of today’s jobs will be gone in 10 years. But they will be replaced by other jobs. You can help your organization prepare employees for these other jobs and the future.

The future holds exciting opportunities for how employees will develop as well as the skills they will need. You may need to re-engineer your talent development function sooner rather than later. You are probably OK doing what you are doing now. But your organization probably needs you to be more innovative than ever to help it move into the future. As a trusted advisor to your leadership, you need to be at the forefront of talent development. Plan to offer an innovative and bold, yet effective and practical, approach to address the developmental needs of all employees. This will ensure your organization reaches its goals.

Yes, there are many new things you can or should do. You will need to keep doing some of what you currently do during the transition and stay ahead of changes and innovation. Be aware of when it’s time to stop doing something—even if you like it and advocate for future change that is best for your organization.

What trends will disrupt and change the TD profession?

What are you experiencing now?

So, do you think you’ll need to stretch?

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1 ATD’s Foundations of Talent Development, Elaine Biech.
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The Trusted Advisor Self-Assessment

As a trusted advisor you will be accountable for three key categories that are expansions and advances beyond what you do now. Although these roles are steeped in theory and talent development basics, they will be unique. Mark each statement. Red for “no way!” Yellow for “yeah, pretty close!” Green for “Yahoo! I’ve got it!”

Collecting and Curating Information
I am skilled and knowledgeable about:

- Discovering when, where, and how individuals learn on demand and its impact
- Understanding how teams learn, while pinpointing competencies required for future success
- Synthesizing what my organization knows and how it knows it
- Determining the skills and knowledge for which we need to recruit and hire
- Measuring the critical business results, valued by my organization (sales, costs, market share)
- Defining and measuring performance that is required by my organization
- Knowing what tools are available for learning and development
- Experimenting confidently until discovering the best interventions for learning, especially learning on demand
- Defining best choices that engage and satisfy the workforce

Coaching and Connecting Others
I am skilled and knowledgeable about:

- Determining optimum ways to assess needs and evaluate results for individuals and organizations
- Coaching supervisors to develop their employees, e.g., rotations, stretch assignments, shadowing
- Guiding individuals to own and create their personal development/learning plan
- Helping individuals select available learning opportunities with an experiential emphasis
- Assisting others to see the value in knowing where key information resides
- Understanding individual needs and requirements and why it’s important
- Identifying and communicating multiple alternatives for learning and discovering
- Optimizing the science and technology of learning to grow critical capabilities
- Locating learning where the work is
- Guiding those who work with and for robots

Consulting and Coordinating Organizational Projects
I am skilled and knowledgeable about:

- Nurturing managers to build a learning culture and an environment of shared knowledge
- Creating and linking a talent strategy to the business
- Leading organizational development, change, and strategic initiatives (globalization, leadership)
- Advocating for the impact of talent on business goals
- Offering solutions to achieve organizational results
- Improving and clarifying systems and processes that influence results
- Partnering with the C-suite to drive the learning agenda
- Developing corporate-wide networks and connections
- Promoting learning as a clear business value proposition, backed up by data
- Presenting an agile and iterative learning strategy

My Attitude

- I believe that my job is to create a change-ready workforce that drives organization agility, innovation, and results.

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## Connecting TD Theory to Future TD Roles

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Be a Trusted Advisor: Build a Partnership with Leaders

Building a partnership with the leaders in your organization is imperative to your success. Solid partnerships between business and talent development ensure that the organization thrives. Here are a few practical principles that we sometimes forget when caught up in the busy days we face.

Get in Lock Step With Your Leadership Team. Who are they? What’s important to them? How do they like to receive information? What’s their background? What’s important to them? What keeps them up at night? Ask questions and observe them. Build one-on-one relationships so that you can have comfortable discussions to determine how you can best help them meet their goals.

Speak the Language of Business. Of course you need to be a good communicator, but speaking in the C-suite language takes it to another level. Recognize and talk about what’s important to them—not you. Be candid, concise, correct, and complete. To be effective you need to learn about your business and the industry. Be conscious of the budgeting timeline, processes, and criteria. Learn more about industry trends that are emerging and how they will affect your organization. Learn about competitors and how your organization differentiates itself from them? And don’t use talent development jargon or acronyms.

Study Your Business’s Strategy. Gain a clear understanding of the strategic imperative, the goals, and the plans to achieve them. Can you list your company’s top three goals? How can you align the talent development opportunities in your department to the business strategies? These strategies may include what you might expect, such as sales growth, employee engagement, or employee retention; they might also include innovative product development; agility; or leveraging a contingent workforce. What does your organization need to achieve its strategy? And how can you use the tools you have to partner on solutions.

Practice Problem Solving. Clarify the problems your organization is facing. Conduct research on the issue and gather some data. Are your competitors facing the same problems? Scan industry and leadership magazines such as Forbes or Harvard Business Review for articles that address similar problems. Capture your thought process and share plans for implementation. Demonstrate that you can think creatively as well as critically. Surround yourself with people who are creative forward thinkers to collaborate on solutions.

Demonstrate Collaboration, Accountability, and Timeliness.
Each of these characteristics is critical to completing a job with quality and on time. When presenting plans, work across boundaries with other departments. Show that you know how to evaluate and mitigate risk and that you are able to create an accountability plan. Bring individuals and groups together to show teamwork.

Become a Systems Thinker. Gather ideas from different parts of the organization, showing that you understand how changes in one part of the organization will affect the rest of the organization. Help to manage change. In addition to thinking about the whole, think long term. What do you know about trends in the world that may cause challenges for your organization in the future? A systems thinker recognizes that all these things are related. A systems thinker examines the linkages and interactions between the components of the entire system. Building a successful partnership with leaders means that everyone must buy in for partnering to work.

Establish Credibility. Be on time every time. Build relationships by being reliable. Do what you say you’ll do. Don’t hesitate to push back on expectations that are unrealistic or unrelated to organizational goals. Show respect and do what it takes to build trust with your business partners. One of the best ways to gain respect and credibility from your leaders is to take the time to understand the business and the work they perform.

Exhibit Enthusiasm. Be positive and proud of the TD department. Display a can-do attitude. Promote positive change and show how you can help the organization solve problems and meet goals. Inspire those around you. And demonstrate your agility and resilience when things don’t go quite like you wanted them to.

Prove Your Worth. Even if you are not ready to roll out your talent development effort, or the budget cycle isn’t right to begin establishing support for your goals, you can do several things that demonstrate the value that talent development can bring to the organization. Part of it is educating your partners and part is helping to solve their problems. Before you begin designing and implementing your talent development effort, you can begin communicating with leaders and managers, instilling the importance of lifelong learning, discussing the organizational values, and preparing for roadblocks and barriers with your partners.
The most important role for TD is to help the organization to reach its strategic priorities. Your organization expects a return on its investment in all learning options. Aligning TD to organizational requirements is the underlying reason why you are on the payroll.

Align Employee Development to the Organization’s Goals
Organizations use a strategy and strategic goals to focus resources on achieving their missions. In turn, departments and teams use goals to guide their efforts to help achieve the business goals. This translates into goals that employees use to perform their jobs better and to continue to develop in general.

In high-performing organizations the strategic business goals, team goals, and employee goals are all aligned to ensure that everyone is headed in the same direction. When this happens, resources are used wisely, employees know what is expected of them, and employee engagement increases.

To ensure that employee development is aligned to organizational requirements when designing, buying, or delivering a training program, you need to start with the organizational strategy and business goals. Think about the nature of the goal regarding the business. For example, consider how you will link the business strategy to employees’ development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

You will have challenges along the way, but none as critical as keeping your talent development program focused on what benefits the organization the most. Organizations achieve alignment when learning is considered a business asset and permeates the culture. Talent development must go beyond the delivery of courses, programs, and modules to ensure learning becomes part of the business. Even fully committed organizations find it tricky to maintain that alignment and challenging to measure whether it exists. So, while I’ve been talking alignment, it means you must also understand the business to which you are aligning.

Elaine’s Proven Process to Align TD to Business Results
To ensure that the talent development function is aligned to the organization’s needs you’ll need to look at the organizational goals and assess how your department fits in. You will also assign a priority to the goals (determined by leadership), suggest methods that TD can use to influence the goals (formal, informal, and technology-based solutions), and establish measures of success (agreed on by both leadership and TD).

So, how do you get there? It’s a straightforward process, but if you’ve never done it before, be prepared to learn a great deal. This process is similar to the process I use as an external consultant, but I have shared it with internal talent development managers and they have been successful with it.

1. **Prepare yourself.** Read your organization’s strategic plan, business plan, and any other documentation that is available. Review the mission, vision, goals, metrics, and even the structure and names of key individuals. Review your most recent customer satisfaction survey and engagement survey. Create a brief presentation for your CEO to explain how you plan to address alignment and why. You may not need it, but it is always good to be prepared. If you have access to the organization’s current goals, print out two copies to take to the meeting to use as a guide (one for you, and one for the CEO—first impressions count!). Come up with a list of questions to gather the information you require, such as:
   - Our annual business plan states xx number of goals. How are we tracking on them?
   - What challenges are you experiencing now or anticipate in the coming year?
   - How do you expect our goals to change for the upcoming year?
   - What are the goals for the two future fiscal years?

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• What tactics do you expect to use to achieve them?
• What metrics have been assigned to each goal?
• How would you prioritize these goals? You are likely to get a response of, “they are all important,” but press for the most important or the top three or some designation that will help with the prioritization.
• Who is the lead for each of these goals? I would like to meet with each to learn more about the goals.
• What new knowledge and skills do you think will be needed to implement the goals and the tactics used?

2. **Meet with your CEO.** You should schedule about 45 minutes for this meeting. Share the process you are using to achieve alignment, and be sure to ask if your CEO has any questions. Use your prepared questions, selecting the ones that are most appropriate for the CEO and for your leaders or sponsors during the next round of questions.

3. **Meet with each goal lead (champion, owner).** Leaders are busy and some may try to delegate this meeting. You may need to leverage your meeting time by prefacing that you met with the CEO, who directed you to them. Be prepared to go deeper with each goal, learning more details, how they are measured, what challenges they are facing, how they are tracking progress, who is responsible for specific areas, what they could use help with, and so forth.

4. **Begin your analysis.** After you have completed all the interviews, summarize what you have learned. Meet with your staff to determine which strategic goals talent development could influence. Assess your department’s current capabilities, being sure to consider your budget, skill level, learning technology, available learning resources, and so forth. Identify the potential affect the talent development function could have on each of the goals.

5. **Determine TD’s contribution.** Prepare for this meeting by focusing on the goal, and how learning could help achieve it. Confirm that you have a clear understanding of the goal. Present your solution, and ask for a list of all the factors that will contribute to the achieving the goal. Ask the lead to put these factors in priority order (including your solution) and place a percent next to each that represents the value of the contribution to success. They should total 100 percent. You now have a metric for the value of your contribution. Finally, ask any questions you would typically ask about a development program: Who is the audience? What’s the timeline? What works best before and after any learning event to ensure application? Is training mandatory? And any other details you need to get started.

6. **Summarize the plan.** Include a summary document that lists the goals, leads, how learning will be involved, audience, the agreed-upon contribution to success value, a timeline, and any other important documentation. I like to put the information in a table. It is much easier to read than a narrative.

7. **Obtain approval.** Deliver the summary document to each goal lead. Obtain the CEO’s approval. Monitor and update the plan regularly. You may want to ensure that the plan is on the senior leadership team’s agenda at least quarterly.

8. **Follow up.** After each interview it is appropriate to send a thank you note to each senior leader—especially if this is the first time you are holding these interviews. After your plan is in place, stay focused. Business moves rapidly and strategies change quickly. This means you need to deliver knowledge and skills for any new direction. Of course, this isn’t easy, but it is critical. If you have a talent management board you will discuss the plans with them.

After going through this process, the benefits should pop out. The pressure to qualify the ROI for dollars spent is built into the process. Alignment highlights the organization’s strategy, so it is clear to all employees and helps them see the direct line from what they do to the organization’s mission. This often leads to a more engaged workforce. The focus on strategy also helps to anticipate challenges and opportunities for the near and distant future. Your organization’s strategy sets the direction. When talent development is aligned with the goals, you can be assured that your team is delivering the skills required for now and the future.
Ideas for Your Development

Look to your organization’s future and get ahead of the curve. What talent development challenges do you need to be ready for in the future? You can take these initial steps to identify what to learn and how to experience it.

What You’ll Want to Learn

Start by having a solid foundation in the theories and basics of the talent development function (column 1 on page 4).

Collecting and Curating Information

- Identify the informal delivery mechanisms that exist in your organizations
- Learn more about your organization’s learning culture
- Explore the topic of disruptive change
- Determine how well employees recognize their role in the organization’s success

Coaching and Connecting Others

- Learn the basics of coaching
- Learn more about how to develop employees who are isolated and working from home or another country
- Discover how humans and machines will interface
- Become an expert at experiential learning
- Build your own inner agility

Consulting and Coordinating Organizational Projects

- Gain business acumen so that you can talk the language of your C-suite
- Learn the basics of consulting
- Become proficient about growth mindset
- Identify what it takes to build or change a culture
- Build a partnership with leadership
- Learn about change management and organizational development
- Practice a proven process to align TD to Business

How to Experience Learning About Your Future in TD

- Create your own Individual Development Plan (IDP).
- Gather a team together to consider the workplace trends and what your organization can do to prepare for those changes.
- Practice coaching willing supervisors who need to develop their employees.
- Create an onboarding plan for part-time gig workers in your organization.
- If you aren’t already, get involved with the recruitment and hiring process in your organization.
- Shadow a senior leader in your organization then determine if you are doing all that you can to tie learning to the organization’s needs.
- Find ways to push beyond your limits—whatever they might be.
- Get involved in what your organization is doing to curate learning and to deliver curated learning.
- Read something by Ray Kurzweil or Bob Johansen about the future.
- Explore what measures are important to your C-suite and how to tie them to employees’ development.
- Help your organization consider a flatter, more agile, even self-organizing structure.
- Reduce complexity; the explosion of information is overwhelming employees.
- Attend a future-focused conference.
- Sign up for Peter Diamandis’ weekly newsletter, “Abundance Insider”.
A Prize for You: Enter to Win a Bundle of Books
Are you a member of ATD? If yes, have I got a deal for you!

On the ATD website you can follow other members. I want to do something special for those who are following me. I am looking for a creative idea to reward my followers. Can you help me? Share your idea with me—big or small—and be sure that I have your email address so that I can get in touch with you if you are the winner of the Book Bundle.

How to enter? Simply email me or write your idea on your business card and give it to me—with your email address. It’s that easy! I hope to have a couple winners! Be sure to follow me on the ATD website so you can be a part of the have fun too.

Elaine Biech
Author, Consultant, Trainer

Elaine Biech is a dedicated lifelong learner who believes that excellence isn’t optional. She has been in the field for more than 35 years helping global organizations and individuals reach their potential. She has published 84 books, including The New Business of Consulting, Training and Development for Dummies, ATD’s Foundations of Talent Development, and the Washington Post #1 bestseller, The Art and Science of Training.

Are you Thinking of Consulting? Elaine is the co-creator of the online course, How to Build Your Successful Training Consulting Business. You can sign up for the next class at https://yourtrainingconsultingbiz.com. She is the recipient of numerous ATD, ASTD, ISA and other professional awards, including the inaugural CPLP Fellow Honoree, the ASTD Torch Award, and the Wisconsin Women’s Mentor Award. Elaine is a consummate training professional who has been instrumental in leading the talent development profession during most of her career.

“Elaine has done a masterful job of presenting the most important parts of consulting. If you want to start a business—and stay in business—The New Business of Consulting is an essential read.”
— Daniel H. Pink, author of WHEN, DRIVE, and FREE AGENT NATION

“The New Business of Consulting is practical, compassionate, and a good alternative to an M.B.A.”
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“The Art and Science of Training is the new Bible for training professionals. Another gem from Elaine Biech!”
—Ken Blanchard, coauthor of The New One Minute Manager® and Leading at a Higher Level

“I loved working with Elaine, on our contracts. She struck fear in the hearts of major consulting contractors like Booz-Allen and Accenture. She is that good. I’ve seen her get a room full of leaders transformed from bitter enemies to friendly partners. If you are thinking about starting a consulting business, I highly recommend her books and courses.”
—David L. Winters, Former Division Director at Office of Naval Research, Author of Taking God to Work

Go for it. And remember . . .

“Orville Wright didn’t have a pilot’s license.”
—Richard Tate