

## ED BETOF

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Ed Betof has held many roles: leader, teacher, coach, mentor, and author. He is currently an academic director for the doctoral program designed for the preparation of chief learning officers, sponsored at the University of Pennsylvania. Betof retired at the end of 2007 as vice president of talent management and chief learning officer at Becton, Dickinson and Company (BD), a global medical technology company. He is the author of *Leaders as Teachers*, available from ASTD Press.

### Q | CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT THE TERM "LEARNING AGILITY" MEANS?

Learning agility is a term that came out of very important and seminal research at the Center for Creative Leadership. It means the ability to learn from experiences and apply what you have learned to new, different, and often unmapped situations.

That's what leaders do. They take organizations, individuals, and teams to different places, heights, and levels of achievement. And learning-agile leaders do it in a way that helps their people to trust them based on what they've learned in the past, their instincts, and their process. There's a growing body of evidence that learning agility is one of the top predictors of leadership potential.

### Q | WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON INFORMAL LEARNING?

There are many different types of learning. Traditionally, we think of classroom learning. During the last decade in particular, technology has added a lot to the learning process. Now you see approaches such as learning communities and Web 2.0, which we could only dream about decades ago. All these methods and platforms are important. They help enable self-initiated or informal learning.

For centuries, people have learned in both formal and informal ways through reading. People also learned in other ways such as through observing role models. These, and many other methods, are still very common.

Enabled by technology, information and knowledge sharing today takes place at unprecedented rates. One of my personal favorite forms of informal learning is listening to books and podcasts on

my MP3 player. This happens to be a form of informal learning that fits my learning style. I go through several books a month in this fashion after downloading them.

I think it's important that people never stop learning, including learning through people, through reading, by listening, and by comparing many different points of view.

### Q | DO YOU THINK ANYONE CAN BE A COACH OR A LEADER? DO YOU THINK THE TWO ROLES ARE MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE?

I do not think everyone can be a coach or a leader. Let me take leader first. People who become effective leaders have to be inclined to take on management and leadership-type roles and responsibilities. There has to be a certain vocational inclination toward leadership as a prerequisite. Secondly, they must have solid intellectual or cognitive horsepower. They also must have a pretty solid level of emotional intelligence. If those three basic requirements are there, then both management and leadership skills can be learned. They are learned best through experiences, especially challenging ones. They're also learned through other people, support, feedback, and coaching.

Coaching also requires a vocational inclination to want to help others. It requires certain levels of intellectual and emotional intelligence. I also believe that the most effective leaders I've seen are leaders who teach and coach. I do think one could be an effective coach, but not necessarily be a leader of others.

### Q | DO YOU THINK THERE ARE ANY ASPECTS OF LEARNING AND TEACHING THAT, DESPITE ANY ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY, WILL NEVER BECOME OBSOLETE?

Yes, I think that there are elements that will never become obsolete. Technology is not a panacea.

It is hard to replace the learning power of leaders, executives, and role models within organizations who teach, coach, and mentor in live, face-to-face environments with learners. For example, I'm reminded of so many occasions where the chairman and CEO at BD, Ed Ludwig, had such a significant impact by physically being and working with our leaders in many program locations around the world. I could say that about dozens and dozens of other executives as well.

I think it's very important not to think about technology and face-to-face interaction that leads to learning as "either-or." Rather, they are "and-also," and complementary. I think I will always feel this way. That personal touch in different kinds of programs is very important.

