

Creating a Handbook

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What is a handbook? How does it differ from a book or compiled work of any kind? What's it like to edit a handbook and how do you get started? Just over a year ago ASTD, released *The ASTD Handbook for Workplace Learning Professionals*. It introduces nine learning and development sections from assessment to evaluation, incorporating contemporary topics such as technology-enabled learning. Each of the chapters is written by a respected leader in the field who specializes in that topic. For example, who better to write about learning in the classroom than Bob Pike?

The handbook, which I edited, also features several luminaries in the Workplace Learning and Performance (WLP) profession; some of them are the practitioners and the implementers of the content. One of the luminaries, for example, is Bill Wiggenhorn, the creator of Motorola University.

A New Handbook is on Its Way

ASTD will publish another handbook: *The ASTD Leadership Handbook*, which will be available in September 2010. I will also edit this volume and thought it might be interesting and fun, over the next couple of weeks, to explore what it takes to create one of these volumes.

I've compiled a number of collected works and a handbook is the most significant type in this class of books. What makes a handbook special? Its name alone implies that it will be written by respected authorities of the topic. You also expect a handbook to be a collection of chapters that are related, yet unique in content.

As the reader you must believe that you will be able to turn to the handbook to find the most accurate as well as useful answers to a variety of questions about the handbook's topic. As a reader who decides to invest in a "handbook," you have high expectations. First of all, the price alone contributes to these expectations, since handbooks are often two or three or even four times the cost of most other hardcover books. The editor must interpret and deliver on these expectations to make it worthwhile. A handbook must be authoritative, complete, and useful.

Authoritative. A handbook must be written by authors whose work you respect and trust. When you pick up *The ASTD Handbook*, you hold over 2000 years of experience within your hands. You know the authors. You've read their work and have depended on their theories and concepts for years. Who would you select to be in the next handbook, *The ASTD Leadership Handbook*?

Complete. A handbook must be fundamental to the subject. Readers have an expectation of key topics that should be covered about the handbook's theme. *The ASTD Handbook*, for example, covers essentially everything you might name in the WLP field. If you were editing *The ASTD Leadership Handbook*, what topics would you include?

Useful. A handbook by its very nature is written by gurus who have conducted research, identified theories, and produced volumes of knowledge on a narrow subtopic. Most of you, however, are too busy to unravel the entire string of research content. You want the nuggets of information, the how-to, and the go-do advice. You want answers to question and implementable ideas. If you were editing *The ASTD Leadership Handbook*, how would you make it useful?

The editor's job is to ensure that the handbook delivers the value that you, the reader, expect. The editor must ensure that the handbook:

- Is authoritative, providing accurate content.
- Is complete, delivering the answers to readers' questions.
- Offers practical information that the reader can implement.

Which Comes First the Authors or the Topics? Who, What, How

Let's address the first two questions: who and what? How do you start a project of this magnitude? Do you select the authors first? Or the topics first? This is one of those chicken or the egg questions. My process is not an "or" but an "and." That is, I implement an entangled process that considers both at the same time and weaves back and forth, and constantly remaining open to other forces.

For example when contemplating the topic of leadership several influential and respected names immediately come to mind: Kouzes and Posner, Jack Zenger, Bill Byham, Ken Blanchard, Bill George, Frances Hesselbein, and others. In addition, several topics immediately come to mind: building a team, strategic planning, ethics, leading change, getting results, leadership development, coaching, authenticity, globally savvy, and women in leadership.

When comparing the two lists, you can see there are some immediate matches: Bill Byham and leadership development; Ken Blanchard and ethics; Bill George and authenticity. But who can address the other topics? There is only one person who can be considered for leading change: John Kotter; likewise for getting results: Dave Ulrich and Norm Smallwood; and coaching: Marshall Goldsmith. Now we still have other leadership experts without a topic. Why not let Kouzes and Posner write about what they know best: the practices of exemplary leaders. The same is true for Jack Zenger: the engaging and inspiring leader; and Frances Hesselbein: leading the workforce of the future.

Rounding Out the Table of Contents

The table of contents is beginning to build. But what about the other topics that we deemed essential? Find the best and most experienced author you can. For example, Len Goodstein has been writing about strategic planning for 30 years or more, and didn't Patrick Lencioni write a couple of great books about leadership and teams? Remember the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) has been doing marvelous work about women in leadership for dozens of years. In fact, should ASTD even publish this book without partnering with CCL. After all, look at the "L" word in the name! Nine CCL authors will write six chapters.

Well, you get the picture. This is how the Table of Contents for *The ASTD Leadership Handbook* was born. The end result is 32 chapters by 42 extraordinary authors. The chapters are starting to arrive: six are early, two authors have asked for extensions (that's okay because I can't read them all on the due date anyway), and several others have assured me that their chapters will arrive on time. To say that this is exhilarating is an understatement!

Practical

The Handbook will ensure that the content from our distinguished authors will be practical and helpful. How will *The ASTD Leadership Handbook* be useful and practical for you? Those of you familiar with my work know that I am all about practical. How can I help you take any content and easily use it in your day-to-day work?

What Constitutes Practical?

We could turn to any number of definitions: adapted for actual use; results of action; engaged in judicious and sensible practice or work; adopt a means to an end; or others from many sources. The bottom line is that practical means you will be able to implement the content to accomplish something of use.

To ensure that *The ASTD Leadership Handbook* is practical, we have asked the authors to contribute a tool that the readers can use to better understand the content, to implement the content with others (after all, you are trainers), or to adapt the content for actual use.

What's a Tool?

What's a tool? Well that's what our authors asked too. We suggested that a tool could be a template, worksheet, checklist, model, quiz, survey, or any job aid that helps the reader implement the content of the chapter. To make it as easy for our authors as possible, I provided few parameters. The tool could be:

- Previously published or not.
- Validated or not.
- Relative to the entire chapter or focus on just one area.

The chapters and their accompanying tools are arriving every day. Here are a few of the tools you will have access to. These tools will help you implement leadership concepts you will read about in *The Handbook*.

- John Kotters Eight Step Change Model.
- Bill Gentry's Checklist for Avoiding Leader Derailment.
- Marshall Goldsmith's mini Coaching Survey.
- Dave Ulrich and Norm Smallwood's Personal Leadership Proficiency Leadership DNA model, they call the Leadership Code.
- Patrick Lencioni's Team Assessment to help you evaluate your team's susceptibility to the five dysfunctions of a team.
- Bev Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evan's "Jerk Checklist."
- Len Goodstein's Applied Strategic Planning Model.
- Ed Betof's Checklist for Mentoring Leaders.

This list constitutes less than 1/3 of the tools that will accompany *The Handbook*. So what do you think? Do these sound practical to you?

How Can You Use the Tools?

Here's the best part. The tools will be found on a companion website. You will be able to download them. As long as you maintain the copyright and the "used with permission" statement on the tool, you will be able to use it for your daily work. Free tools! Now that's exciting!

Quality

This series has covered various topics of creating *The ASTD Leadership Handbook*. How do you get started? What's more important authors or content? How can you ensure practicality? This week let's consider how a leadership handbook can be high quality—be the best that it can be.

How Can You Ensure Quality?

Those of you who know my work, know that quality is extremely important to me. Quality should be high on your list of everything you do—first, last, and everything in between. *The Handbook* will be written by well known gurus (Hesselbein, Blanchard, and Collins), include topics that are intriguing ("Leading Across Generations" and "Leading in Difficult Times"), and present tools that are practical (surveys, checklists, and assessment plans). This level of excellence *must* exude quality.

As you can imagine the quality question is one that permeates everything that we do with this handbook. Here is our three-step plan to ensure that the practical and exciting content is high quality through and through.

Three Steps to Quality

To ensure quality, you need to start with a plan. Here are our three steps to quality.

Step 1: Set clear guidelines. Like any task, provide authors with clear expectations. Not just the logistics, such as length, font size, and layout, but also what they might cover in their content. Ensure that you are very clear about deadlines and don't set them too far out. It doesn't take long to write a chapter—especially if they are the experts, like our authors. Set a short deadline—that is close to their acceptance.

Step 2: Start with the best. If you don't begin with excellent ingredients right from the start whether you are baking a pie, building a house, or writing a book, it is nearly impossible to produce a high-quality product in the end. The authors for *The ASTD Leadership Handbook* are the best in class. They were selected because they are experts in the topic area they represent in *The Handbook*.

Step 3: Stay organized. Quality is for the reader's benefit. As I have worked through this project I kept the reader in mind. For example, the reader needs to be able to easily and quickly find things in *The Handbook*. I planned the chapter topics and then placed them in five logical sections. I ensured that the titles say what the chapter is about. I am working with Tora Estep, my most trusted editor from ASTD. Together we will ensure that every

chapter is written clearly and error free. We'll ensure that you have a reading list if you want to explore more about a topic. And finally, we will create an index that helps you easily locate content.

But quality doesn't end with the publication date. It goes on. The website that will be dedicated to this book provides an opportunity for continuous process improvement—a key to quality. Authors will have an opportunity to update their chapters or the tools they have posted as they discover new and better ideas and processes related to their chapters. As you can see quality is built into *The ASTD Leadership Handbook*. It is indeed the foundation of this project.

Authors

We've focused on the content of *The ASTD Leadership Handbook*: how to select topics, how to ensure its usefulness, and how to guarantee quality. Let's turn our attention toward the authors of The Handbook.

This Special Opportunity

What's it like to work with the gurus of our profession? Gosh, what can I say? Heady? Exhilarating? Humbling? Daunting? It is for sure all of these.

To discuss change with John Kotter in his office at Harvard Square; to question Dave Ulrich about "getting results"; to write a note to Jim Collins; to receive a phone call from Frances Hesselbein; to have Ken Blanchard say "yes" to writing a chapter about ethics and integrity; to catch Bill George between books; to receive the first chapter from Len Goodstein; or to have Jack Zenger respond to an email in less than 12 hours. All of these are electrifying moments of this project—and in my life!

I've started reviewing the work of these famous authors, and to say reading their chapters is stimulating is an understatement. Wait until you have an opportunity to read the final product!

Working With Gurus

How do you manage folks with more important things to do than write a chapter for your book? Jim Kouzes, Bev Kaye, Bill Byham, Cindy McCauley, VADM Lockard, and the other authors—these are busy people with others constantly tugging at them. You need to make it easy for them to give you what you need. Clear guidelines helps. Ensure that they are writing about their specialty. Make the job as easy as falling off a log. Don't ask them to do mundane tasks that publishing requires. Work with their administrative assistants whenever possible for something like turning color figures to black and white. When you receive a booklist with just the books' names, do the research yourself. Don't bother them with the details. Create and maintain a communication plan. Touch base regularly and provide information to them as they need it--not in lengthy guidance at the beginning.

How do you appeal to a guru's willingness to work on a project? Build pride in the project. You can do this by ensuring they know how much you want them to be a part of the

handbook. For example, I can't imagine having a chapter about change without John Kotter being the author. Can you? I told him just that—and sincerely meant it.

In the end, how do you work with a guru group? I think three things are important:

- Make it easy and fun.
- Do the mundane for them.
- Ensure that they are proud to be a part of the project.

Editing this handbook is exciting. It is the best job anyone could have! I am honored and delighted to have such an exhilarating experience.