

Bouncing upward

92% of alumni say *Efficacy* programs helped them improve problem solving, push through challenges, and show resilience after failure.

Ursula Burns had neither an easy nor direct path on her rise as Chairman and CEO of Xerox. The first African-American woman to head a Fortune 500 company has candidly discussed her many challenges (Burns 2016): She grew up in public housing in a bad part of Manhattan, black, poor, and raised by a hard-working single mother. Although she became what now would be called a math geek in school, she struggled early in college, where she picked a wrong major, then switched. She graduated as a mechanical engineer, but left her area of academic expertise early in her career, to become an assistant to a marketing executive. Burns praises her devoted mother and says she has lived by her wise words (Hymowitz 2013): “Where you are is not who you are.” Her persistence in the face of obstacles offers invaluable insights not only to elite corporate executives. Her exemplary resilience can be game-changing for aspiring talent from groups under-represented in the workforce, Korn Ferry Hay Group research has found.

In interviews and surveys with 237 alumni of the firm’s *Efficacy* programs, the Korn Ferry Institute found that more than 92% of alumni reported that the multi-day workshops had helped them become slightly more effective, more effective, or substantially more effective in being resilient after failure, pushing through challenges, and engaging in a problem-solving orientation (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

They are more likely to persist and find solutions in difficult circumstances.



Interviewed and surveyed on average two years after completion of Korn Ferry’s *Efficacy* programs, more than 25% of alumni said the program also had helped them to develop a mindset of learning and growth.



The *Efficacy* programs, which also may include follow up, depending on the clients, assist participants in figuring how to view challenges as learning experiences and opportunities to improve, rather than reflections of their worth and innate abilities. One alumnus, who had questioned if he had sufficient experience to step up to a challenging position, found from his Efficacy experience, that, “I now believe I have the skills and intelligence to learn what I need to excel. I made a big leap in my career right after going through the program when I didn’t have the experience.”

When asked about the insights they gained about themselves in the program, more than 25% of program alumni referred to their development of a mindset of learning and growth, also known as the efficacy mindset (see sidebar). Participants say it spurs them to develop constantly through dedication and hard work. They also said it helps them in relationships at work, as they learned coworkers also could benefit from hard work and dedication.

Speaking about mentoring managers who had given up on those who report to them, one alumni said, “If they invest the time, there’s potential for a turnaround.” The firm’s research suggests that *Efficacy* not only positively affects participants but also others, with alumni increasing their support for their learning and development, and, more broadly, their organizations too.

The adaptive, efficacy mindset leads diverse leaders to put in place at work new and innovative strategies so they succeed. This mindset and approach to problems is valuable for all leaders but particularly for those from underrepresented groups. They often face unique challenges, including conscious and unconscious bias, and fewer networking and advancement opportunities. These leaders also may have been subjected to false messages about their innate ability; the efficacy mindset dispels these, seeking to empower all participants.

By influencing the way participants manage others, Efficacy can help boost organizations’ bottom line, giving them focused, dedicated talent: 96% of alumni agreed with the statement, “I am motivated to develop and grow my skills.” But only 50% of them agreed that they had discussed and set expectations for the workshops with their managers, though 83% said they felt that leaders in their organizations supported their development.

Korn Ferry’s Efficacy programs foster an efficacy mindset, under which leaders explore the view that any skill can be learned, given sufficient time and effort. This contrasts with the fixed mindset, the view that people’s capabilities are predetermined and unlikely to change. Decades of academic research (Dweck 2007) confirm that an efficacy versus a fixed mindset is more likely to lead individuals to achieve their full potential and success.

The three items were highly correlated,¹ suggesting that motivation to develop and grow is influenced by managerial and organizational support; analyses indicated that 45% of the motivation variance was explained by respondents' perceptions of organizational support. In other words: if employees felt organizational support,² they were more likely to report being motivated to develop and grow.

That's something Xerox CEO Burns understands, with her many volunteer efforts to support women and people of color. Burns, who has been involved in difficult transformations at the company where she has worked since she was an intern, has said that "Dreams do come true, but not without the help of others, a good education, a strong work ethic, and the courage to lean in." (Burns 2016) She emphasized that it is important for individuals and organizations to learn to, "Fail fast and make sure that you fail early." (Hymowitz 2013) As her comment underscores, persistence, problem-solving, and the capacity to bounce back from adversity can make a world of difference. The *Efficacy* programs, research shows, can provide an effective means to extend critical capacities for resilience and professional potential to diverse talent that can benefit greatly and contribute even more to their organizations.

References

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¹ Motivation and manager expectations $r(123) = .31, p < .001$, motivation and organizational support $r(123) = .67, p < .001$, and manager expectations and organizational support $r(123) = .35, p < .001$.

² Regression variance, or R^2 , ranges from 0-100%. In general, the higher the R^2 , the better the regression model fits the data. Attempts to predict human behavior typically see R^2 values lower than 50%.

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