Executive Interview

with **Lori Mazan**,
Co-founder, President and Chief Coaching Officer
Sounding Board

The Need for a Revolution in Leadership Development

About Sounding Board

Sounding Board helps shape the dynamic leaders needed to thrive in today's turbulent global market. Our Dynamic Leader Development Suite combines solution design, adaptive software, people-to-people development, and proprietary data and insights to drive and scale people strategy. Our award-winning SaaS technology delivers unparalleled flexibility, and our powerhouse roster of world-class coaches leverages decades of leadership and coaching experience to accelerate the development of leaders at all levels.

Recognition

Sounding Board won Gold in the 2022 Brandon Hall Group™ Excellence in Technology Awards® for Best Advance in Online Coaching Tools.

EXCELLENCE IN TECHNOLOGY AWARDS

Talent Management	**1** Gold Award

About Lori Mazan

Lori Mazan is the co-founder, president and chief coaching officer for Sounding Board, the first Dynamic Leaders Development Suite designed to bridge the leadership gap. One of the first 250 ICF-certified coaches globally, she has spent more than 25 years coaching C-Suite executives in developing critical leadership capabilities that have immediate, positive business impact.

Lori, certified by the Coaches Training Institute, now the Co-Active Training Institute, has coached leaders in top companies such as Chevron, Sprint and Citibank, as well as venture-backed high-growth companies like Intellikine, Tapjoy and 10XGenomics.

Many of her CEO and executive clients said they would have benefited from leader coaching earlier in their careers. This led Lori to partner with her previous executive coaching client, Christine Tao, to launch the Sounding Board Dynamic Leadership Suite, with the vision of empowering organizations to develop leaders at all levels by eliminating key barriers such as administrative tasks and reducing costs. The Suite combines solution design, adaptive software, people-to-people development, and measurable data and insights.

Lori is also the author of "Leadership Revolution: The Future of Developing Dynamic Leaders."

About Rachel Cooke

Rachel Cooke is Brandon Hall Group's Chief Operating Officer and Principal Analyst. She is responsible for business operations, including client and member advisory services, marketing design, annual awards programs, conferences and the company's project management functions. She also leads Advancing Women in the Workplace and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives, research and events. Rachel worked in the HCM research industry for 20+ years and held several key management and executive positions within the Talent and Learning Research, and Performance Improvement industries.

Q RACHEL

The name of your book is called "The Future of Developing Dynamic Leaders" and why is it about a revolution for leadership development. What were your framework and the drivers for developing this book.

A LORI

The work environment and external environment have changed so much over the last 5-10 years. It's so dynamic and ever-changing, and unless organizational leaders are developed in a way that lets them adapt to all the unpredictable things happening, they won't be very successful and the organization won't be either.

I wrote the book because I've been a 25-year executive coach, and I've seen that the external and work environment has changed dramatically. Yet the way companies develop leaders has barely changed at all. In fact, I've been a bit alarmed because organizations have been doubling down on a skill-based learning model, which is one of the oldest development models dating back to the 1970s.

This model has only about a 10% impact on development and very low transfer of learning to actual daily work. Yet I keep hearing people talking about upskilling and reskilling, which do have value, but as a baseline, skill-based development alone is not going to create leaders who can be exceptional in the unpredictable, ever-changing environment we're dealing with now.

Q RACHEL

Why aren't enough companies providing coaching as deeply as they could or need to.

A LORI

That was why we started Sounding Board, because the highest level leaders in organizations have been doing coaching for about 20 years. It started as a profession, as an industry in the early '90s and became big in the 2000s. And the thing that was unfortunate is it was behind closed doors — the very first well-known coaches talked about how coaching was for "derailed executives," so they didn't want anyone to know they had a coach.

So in the early days it was like a very much a secret weapon. I would coach these, I mean CEO, C-Suite folks of Fortune 100 companies and they would be hiding that they had a coach. And yet they knew it was incredibly impactful for them and may took them from good to exceptional leaders. And it's only in the last 10 years or so that folks have realized that coaching can be used from a developmental perspective. It's not remedial and so we do know people are using it. We started Sounding Board to try to expand coaching usage for all leaders in organizations, and one reason is those folks that I coached in the early years always said, "Wow, I wish I had this earlier in my career. Why did I only get this when I'm already at the top of the house?" I was like, "Yeah, that's a good question."

Q RACHEL

If an acting talent or an athlete puts in years and years of training to become excellent, why would a leader think they could be excellent at their job without a coach?

A LORI

As a leader, you're always on in the work environment, which is a lot of hours a day. It doesn't matter when things happen, someone's calling you, and you have to be on.

One of the stories was coaching an executive, and in the middle of the night, there was a coup in the country where they operated. The executive called, unsure of what to do, and the coach provided a thinking partner to talk through the options and come up with a plan.

As a leader, you're always on. It's so much more impactful and stressful than an athlete, where at the end of the game, you get to just relax and be done. As a leader, you don't know if you won or lost until pretty far down the road.

Q RACHEL

What are the things that we need to think about, whether you're an HR professional or you're a leader yourself?

A LORI

One reason I am a fan of coaching is it allows leaders to develop capacities and capabilities beyond just skills — so finding ways to blend skills that fit personally for that individual so it's authentic and yet is contextually and environmentally appropriate.

It's impossible to do that in any kind of training situation. I started my career as a front-of-the-room trainer. And after training people on all kinds of skills, they would always ask the same question, how do I use this in my daily life? And the value of coaching in daily life is the fodder for the coaching conversation. Everything you're doing is about how to handle the things that are coming up in your daily life as a leader and how to do that in your own style, in the context of your company, in the context of the work that you're doing. It's very suited to the outcome that you're looking for.

Coaching just has so many benefits for leader development. And yet, as you said, organizations, one, don't use it. It's time-consuming to set it up. It can be expensive. And that's the whole point of a company like Sounding Board, where we have a software platform where you can manage your own internal coaching or you can blend with external coaches from Sounding Board.

You have a comprehensive solution depending on how you want to use it. It's very customizable. One thing we were very intentional about is that we don't profess a specific leadership approach. All of our software and coaching is customizable so that it is blended with the leadership approach of the organization.

(continued)

The reason for this is that one of the top reasons people come to me for coaching is that leaders who change companies often struggle to adapt to a different culture. Organizations have their own employee culture, organizational culture and needed leadership culture. We are not trying to change that. We are trying to be an extension of that.

Q RACHEL

How important are assessments in development of leaders?

A LORI

Almost all the assessment companies started in the last century and some of them have upgraded. If you like assessments, make sure you get something more upgraded because the ones from the last century still have that old model of leadership.

The reason I don't like assessments is they are point in time. If I'm an employee and I had a poor conversation with my manager yesterday and today I'm filling out an assessment on them, I'm not going to be very happy. There's a frequency bias that's often in there. Because it's point in time, it's not that valuable. In the early days, all of this was on paper and I used to do these assessment debriefs and it'd be so much information. We just try to nail it, you know, narrow it down to like two or three items they could work on. And I saw it came in a notebook and that notebook would be on the shelf the next time I came to that person's office. They were not using it.

We do a small assessment that's a self-assessment. We have a manager assessment. We have manager alignment meetings so that the manager can weigh in on the development that the person is working on, but it's more real-time than it is a point-in-time assessment.

People have been trying some new models, which is a more continuous assessment or quarterly performance and we have some ideas about how to do that differently. It's more around alignment than performance. But I think all of those old-school approaches need to be upgraded to match with the current environment. If you're if you're doing a static assessment and your environment's changing on an hourly daily basis, it's not going to help you very much.

In those debriefs, the first hour was always trying to talk people down from their reaction. No one gets assessment feedback that's exceptional, so I had to help them work through their reactions and get to something useful. Without that coach debriefing, they wouldn't get to that.

The other thing is the point about perception. Assessments are about the perception of others, and it's hard to change other people's perceptions, even though managing perceptions is one of the top things leaders need to do. To do that, you have to examine your own thinking that leads to the behavior that creates the perception.

Without being able to delve into your own thinking, beliefs, and patterns, no big change is going to happen. Coaching gets below the surface of "this is how others perceive you" to "how are you thinking about this and what's the impact you're wanting to have?" It's a different frame of reference that's much more non-judgmental and starts where the individual leader is and brings them to the next level of thinking. That's why it's more successful than just looking at an assessment, which leads to very minimal change in daily work life.

Q RACHEL

What will leadership development will look like five years from now?

A LORI

One thing that's been very impactful for leader development is the change in the length of tenure of leaders and employees in organizations. When I started, large corporations hired folks right out of their schooling and kept them to retirement. There was about a 20-year trajectory of leader development. You could have that planned out over time. Now, the average tenure of an employee at an organization is around three years, and a leader may be around four or five years. So you only have a quarter of the length of time to develop these leaders.

McKinsey had an interesting survey that said executives, only 11% of them believe their leadership development programs are successful. And why is that? We're only getting to part one. We're never getting to parts two and three because we just don't have enough time. So that means reinventing leader development to fit into that shortened timeframe. And then you add the generational differences in there. There are around five generations in the workforce right now and they all think very differently.

Q RACHEL

In the wave of AI, why is human-to-human development so critical?

A LORI

AI is going to be super impactful for organizations and there's going to be a lot of skill training needed around that. But from a leadership perspective, that approach doesn't get below the surface. The nice thing is it can show patterns, which is great, but how did those patterns get in place and how do you change your thinking to change those patterns? I don't think AI is going to help with that.

I think what's going to be useful is a blend of human interaction and AI tools that complement each other. I don't think in terms of leadership development, GenAI is going to be able to do it on its own. It may be able to speed up some of the basic stuff in skill development so that leaders can get faster to the capability and capacity and rethink part of the developmental path.

(continued)

A human being has to put the original content in there. It's the same old technological issue — garbage in, garbage out. Training those models depends on what data you're putting in there to train those models. I already can see some of that's going to be a problem. If you're putting in data for individual contributors and then you're trying to train senior leaders on that, it's not going to work. It's going to be challenging to be able to create the sophisticated leaders need as they're advancing in an organization because there just isn't going to be a lot of information.

I think that AI is going to be helpful at the lowest levels. It's not going to be as helpful as a good leadership coach can be.

Here are some ways to listen to the interview on Brandon Hall Group's Excellence at Work Podcast:

iTunes

Spotify

YouTube

Brandon Hall Group
EXCELLENCE AT WORK

About Brandon Hall Group™

With more than 10,000 clients globally and more than 30 years of delivering world-class research and advisory services, Brandon Hall Group™ is focused on developing research that drives performance in emerging and large organizations, and provides strategic insights for executives and practitioners responsible for growth and business results.

Membership
Individual and Enterprise Membership Options: Includes research assets, advisory support, a client success plan and more.

Professional Certifications
Self-paced certification programs. Virtual group sessions for companies. In-person conferences and summits.

Advisory Offerings
Custom Research Projects, including surveys, focus group interviews and Organization Needs Assessment for Transformation, Technology Selection and Strategy.

Excellence Awards
Three annual programs recognize the best organizations that have successfully deployed programs to achieve measurable results.

SOME WAYS WE CAN HELP

ENTERPRISE EXCELLENCE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM
Recognizes the best HCM programs that transform their organization and achieves breakthrough results. This designation is a step above the HCM Excellence Awards® which focuses on one program within a company. Enterprise Excellence is a hybrid of award winners who are also members.

SMARTCHOICE® PREFERRED PROVIDER PROGRAM
Uniquely places HCM service and technology companies at the top of organizations' consideration list of vendors. It adds an unmatched level of credibility based on BHG's twenty-eight-plus years of experience in evaluating and selecting the best solution providers for leading organizations around the world.

AGENCY! BY BRANDON HALL GROUP™
Provides comprehensive marketing solutions for human capital manaagement solution providers. We offer strategic services to establish a strong foundation for your marketing efforts.