



## **An Effective Leadership Development Experience through Modular Skill Based Simulations**

### **Mr. Tim Boyd, Northrop Grumman Corporation**

After graduating from the California Institute of Technology in 2006, Tim started working at Northrop Grumman as a Systems Engineer. Since 2006, Boyd has not only been involved in performance analysis and on-orbit sensor characterization but has also managed technical teams as a technical team lead and a deputy Integrated Project Team lead within the SEIT (Systems Engineering Integration and Test) organization. Boyd has presented his work at both academic and industry conferences. Furthermore, to address his passion for leadership development and community building, he kickstarted a chapter of Connect1NG; a professionally recognized yet non-traditional development program focused on engaging and assimilating new employees to the workplace through leadership development activities and networking. He is currently one of two Western Region liaisons for the program. Boyd was also selected to be a part of the company's prestigious LTP (Leadership Training Program) and, just two cycles from graduation, planned and facilitated two recent offsite retreats, events involving a hundred participants, requiring months of detailed planning and acute project management. An avid nature lover, Boyd's hobbies include back country camping and hiking as well as learning self reliance in the wild.

### **Mr. Eric Paul Pearson, Northrop Grumman, Electronic Systems**

Eric Pearson is the Director of Cross-Sector Program Initiatives for Northrop Grumman Corporation. His responsibilities include relationship building and cross culture leadership development. Eric has a BS in Education from Bowie State University and an MS in Technical Management from the Johns Hopkins, Whiting School of Engineering. Eric is best known for his development and leadership of the Northrop Grumman Electronic Systems New Graduate Engineering Rotation Program and the Recent Graduate Leadership Training Program (LTP), having selected and mentored over 650 leaders through the 18 month journey of self-discovery. In addition Eric has served on several Industry Advisory Boards at North Carolina State University, currently serves as a volunteer Adjunct Professor in the School of Engineering at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, and recently completed a five-year term on the Board of Directors for the Southern Association of Colleges and Employers.

### **Mr. Noah Miller, Northrop Grumman, Electronic Systems**

Noah Miller – Change Agent, Intrapreneur, and Software Engineer – brings passion to all that he does, especially in fusing technology and people to accomplish the mission. Most recently, "His business awareness and leadership skills have grown in scope as he takes on challenges beyond his cost and schedule objectives that are geared towards helping elicit excellence from others in the company." He has kicked it into high-gear as an engineer-teacher after graduating from a prestigious experiential leadership training program in the Spring of 2010.

His unique perspectives on leadership come from experiences in both small, private companies with at most ten people to large, public companies that include upwards of fifteen thousand. He has worked as a facilitator, trainer, engineer, mentor, and leader within his ten years of industry experience. As part of a legacy greater than himself, Noah is a true believer in the divine, and seeks strength through diversity in both perspectives and open and honest dialogue.

Noah holds a Bachelor's of Science in Computer Science from the School of Engineering and Applied Science at the University of Virginia, located in Charlottesville. He has recently relocated from Virginia to Chicago, IL. In his past life, he became an expert in modeling and synthesizing machinery control systems for the Maritime industry and founded the OWNERSHIP process as means to drive culture change from all directions within the organization. He currently works as a senior engineer to develop cutting-edge infrared counter measure systems, striving to use technology as a shield to human life. It's all about the ends, not the means.

## **An Effective Leadership Development Experience Through Modular Skill Based Simulations**

Leadership development is considered one of the most critical challenges facing many industries today. Most commercialized leadership training programs provide classroom training, team building opportunities and cross-team projects; however, few have the insight to engage participants in a safe environment where they are allowed to learn and grow in a remote location, away from their daily, risk adverse responsibilities. More specifically, a safe environment is one in which failure is not only an option but highly embraced when it occurs during a stretch assignment; for it is well documented that individuals learn far more from failures, than from successes.

Developed over the past ten years, the Leadership Training Program (LTP) at Northrop Grumman Electronic Systems (NGES) provides this critical component in the form of an experiential education experience where participants have the opportunity to introspectively assess themselves, and interact with like-minded peers in search of extreme leadership lessons. To those in the Northrop Grumman LTP, this experience is known as an offsite and considered by many to be a leadership "boot camp". Instead of what normally takes ten to fifteen years of progression through multiple levels of corporate leadership, LTP alumni that take full advantage of the program gain a fast-forwarded experience over a three to four year period.

As alumni of the program, the authors have benefited from the "complete experience," growing from participants to facilitators, facilitators to coaches, coaches to planners, and planners to leads. Through the evolution of the program and many lessons learned, their experience has helped them identify two main approaches to offsite execution: experiential and skill-based. While each type of offsite includes overlapping spheres of learning development, such that some of the elements are inseparable, their execution is unique.

This paper will focus on the execution of a skill based offsite; one that is focused on self-discovery and knowledge acquisition through full immersion into independent modules, preferably focused on both traditional and non-traditional leadership skills. Each module is independently, yet carefully, developed and operated to create a modular learning experience in which the knowledge gained from each module perfectly complements the others.

This composition will take you through the journey to design, develop, and execute a 4-day skill based offsite for the LTP at NGES. Furthermore, the composition will attempt to validate the development methodologies chosen by the offsite planners along with qualitative results realized through the final execution. Finally, the composition will describe in detail the critical effect team coaches and intentional feedback have on the success of the simulation.

## *The Northrop Grumman, Electronic Systems Leadership Training Program*

As the 21<sup>st</sup> Century began on January 1, 2000, it was already evident, the “baby boomer” generation was fast approaching retirement age and there would soon be a shortage of engineers, scientists and corporate leaders. In 2003, Northrop Grumman Electronics Systems Engineering & Manufacturing Division at the Baltimore, Maryland location, in partnership with Learning and Development (L&D), developed a unique approach to accelerate leadership development for recent graduates by creating an experiential, eighteen-month Leadership Training Program. The core curriculum, known as the Foundations of Leadership, was a significant part of the experience and was designed, coordinated and facilitated by the L&D team. This program was designed and implemented after conducting significant research of several leadership training programs at defense electronic and non-defense Fortune 100 corporations. The potential participants were involved in the design as they completed surveys and personal interviews to evaluate their desire to grow both technically and as leaders during the early period of their new careers at Northrop Grumman.

This experimental program was developed during the early period of 2003 and in September of the same year the first of what would be seventeen groups of self-nominated professionals from across all functions and business areas began their eighteen-month journey through a combination of classroom experiences in traditional leadership studies combined with non-traditional experiential sessions outside of the work environment. The experiential portion offered participants an opportunity to develop self-confidence, to grow through networking with other like-minded peers across the country, and to challenge each other through a series of weekend offsite leadership summits in mentally and physically challenging rustic environments. Another key element of the experiential portion of the LTP was when twenty of the program participants at a time prepared the role of a general during the Battle of Gettysburg and shared leadership discussions while spending a full day walking the hallowed grounds of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

This leadership program is a key component of the development efforts offered by NGES. In order to continue to provide a high impact and valuable growth opportunity for those involved, the program has continued to evolve over time. The early elements of the LTP have provided insightful trade studies on the effectiveness of specific techniques utilized within the program. A handful of these elements have stood the test of time while others have been replaced by more effective techniques in order to improve the overall experience of participants within the program. This rich history and adaptability has allowed the program to select the most compelling elements and combine them into an extremely powerful journey for those in search of extreme leadership lessons.

## *The Offsite Weekend Leadership Retreat*

Not only is the offsite weekend retreat a unique developmental tool for growing leaders through the experience of the participants, the purpose and process of developing and executing the semi-annual event provides significant personal leadership developmental opportunities to growing leaders at different levels of their personal and professional development. The planning, content development, execution and participation during the weekend are accomplished by all involved through volunteering their time, expertise, and efforts.

The weekend success centers on genuine and extreme output from a unique set of individuals:

1. Program participants who have agreed to attend a minimum of two weekend retreats
2. Former program participants who volunteer to:
  - a. Create a unique theme and program content
  - b. Manage a budget and schedule
  - c. Recruit and lead volunteer content developers
  - d. Arrange executive speakers
  - e. Solicit and guide volunteer weekend coaches
  - f. Manage communications and logistics
3. Previous program graduates who offer their expertise as volunteers:
  - a. Content developers
  - b. Logistic leads
  - c. Evaluators
  - d. Coaches
4. Executive speakers (minimum three per each offsite weekend)
5. Volunteer coaches, speakers, content developers from:
  - a. Industry executives (inside and outside of the company)
  - b. Academia
  - c. Program planners personal contacts
  - d. Other Sector leaders across the corporation

This element of the program is unique in its content, success and effect on personal leadership growth because of the opportunities afforded by each of these groups of people. They bring their own set of skills and diversity of thought to create a unique offsite and unparalleled success of learning and networking across a variety of opportunities and corporate communities. Each lead team is provided a structure and format for the weekend. Everything from participants, coaches, content and weekend themes are different, providing many opportunities to fail and succeed in a safe environment where not only are leadership styles managed, all participants go through significant self-discovery and networking with people across the country and several disciplines.

When two to four developing leaders from the Leadership Training Program volunteer to develop and execute a weekend leadership retreat, their responsibilities lie in the following areas:

1. Budget management
2. Weekend theme
3. Program content
4. Volunteer coach solicitation and training
5. Content speakers
6. Internal and external executive presence
7. Communications
8. Solicitation of participants
9. Feedback

These experiential weekend training summits involve between sixty-five and ninety participants, leads, coaches and keynote speakers. The opportunity to succeed and fail exists at every turn beginning with program development and continuing through execution. No matter the level of participation or the years of previous experience, everyone experiences group realizations and personal growth.

#### *Development of the Offsite Weekend Leadership Retreat*

This section outlines the construct and necessary framework to aid in the planning and execution of the spring 2011 offsite for the Leadership Training Program. This offsite focused its execution as a skill based offsite; one that is focused on self-discovery and knowledge acquisition through immersion into simulated modules, each focused on developing specific leadership skills. It consisted of multiple modules that intricately complemented each other to create a learning experience in which the knowledge gained from each module provided valuable feedback for each individual.

The offsite was designed to simulate a development assessment center, which is a place where the skills and talents of individuals are reviewed to determine their suitability for a particular role, especially one of leadership. Based off the corporate environment at the time of inception, the authors believed it was critical for individuals to understand their own strengths and weaknesses within the realm of leadership. The modular experience of a skill based offsite afforded the ability to provide individuals an extremely focused and insightful assessment of their current abilities.

There was a discussion regarding whether to involve professional consultants and evaluators during the development of this experiential weekend in order to effectively quantify the results from each assessment. However, in maintaining the personal leadership growth elements of the program, it was decided to create and evaluate the assessment modules from within the program. This decision proved to be invaluable to the planners and participants because they were allowed

to create an environment conducive to experiential learning through the development of fundamental leadership skills. This environment reflected their own experiences and provided an incredible learning environment for all those involved.

The specific skills that were evaluated during this weekend simulation included but were not limited to:

1. Effective communication
2. Time constrained organization
3. Mentorship
4. Presentation skills

The effective communication module incorporated various types of communication methods and illustrated how and when each should be used. Real world examples, such as office communication, email functionality and the written word, were simulated.

Time constrained organization focused on the ability to quickly sort through vast amounts of information, organize the relevant pieces of the information and present unfamiliar, yet thoroughly sorted, material to an unknown audience.

The mentoring module described methods utilized in successful mentoring partnerships. A mentoring simulation was created to allow individuals an opportunity to practice the skills obtained in this module by rotating from person to person in order to maximize their experience.

The presentation skills module described the most effective ways to communicate when presenting material. It focused on summarizing the material being discussed, the preparation of charts and provided individuals a crash course on appearance and body language. It culminated in an opportunity to present material with feedback from their peers and coaches.

The remainder of this section will focus on the module focused on time constrained organization and will provide additional detail regarding the learning objectives, the module structure, development of material and the execution.

It was our intent for the participants to understand that individual contributors are just as important as the team itself. There are certain times in which individual contributions must be made, while other successes can only be accomplished as a team.

We also wanted the participants to understand the critical importance of deadlines. Every project has a deadline, whether imposed by a customer or a personal goal. In order to demonstrate that effective organization is a key contributor to success, time related deadlines were strictly enforced during the simulation.

Lastly, we wanted the participants to learn more about their own abilities through feedback and skill based projects but also to embrace their failures and learn from their mistakes. Through the

course of the weekend, every module or assessment they would participate in would not be their most defining moment. In fact, we intentionally wanted to make the simulations difficult enough to force unfavorable outcomes. Ultimately, we wanted to encourage them to realize this and learn from it as they moved forward, potentially broadening their minds and perspectives while sharpening their overall situational awareness.

A key element of this particular offsite was the ability to objectively and quantitatively assess skills and abilities. This was done through the use of a rubric. In order to evaluate specifically defined skills from each and every simulation and to facilitate feedback, which is critical to the development process, a rubric was created and used by the assessors to quantify the core competencies. This rubric was utilized during each simulation to provide all participants an individual assessment of their own personal skills. In some modules, the rubric was also utilized to assess the abilities of teams of individuals. Finally, to complete their assessment and provide themselves with a fully rounded set of feedback, each individual introspectively assessed their own competencies within the specific domain.

Once the core competencies and assessment criteria were established, the structure and flow of the simulation module was developed. In order to utilize time most effectively and to ensure that all defined learning objectives were met, the module was broken into four main elements:

1. Background
2. Organization
3. Presentations and grading
4. Feedback/reflection

In order to set the stage for this skill based module an introductory discussion was developed to provide information on the basics of organizational skills and simple algorithms utilized every day to sort through large amounts of information, quickly and efficiently. Participants were also briefed on the rubric that would be used to grade their end product and how it would be utilized to effectively assess their abilities. Follow on discussions led to the importance of staying on schedule and defining an appropriate leadership structure at the beginning of the process.

After the completion of the background, the scenario for the simulation was unveiled. The scenario centered around an employee who has just a few hours to sort through many unfamiliar program related documents (both technical and non-technical) to support a briefing his supervisor has with a high ranking government official. His supervisor will not have time to review the material prior to the meeting and must be able to answer any and all questions from the government official with the organized material.

Because the majority of work that occurs in engineering organizations happens in team environments, we wanted to simulate the dynamics of team collaboration. Thus, we broke the group into two smaller teams, each consisting of approximately 8 people. This smaller group of

individuals encouraged each participant to own a part of the project and discouraged anyone from hiding in the shadows during the simulation.

To begin their assignments, both teams were provided with an assortment of materials that could be utilized in preparation of their final product. An assortment of office supplies were provided to each team to support their creation of a well organized end product that could easily contain all of the necessary information and be easily reviewed by others.

The timeline allowed the participants 70 minutes to perform the sorting phase of this simulation. To make the material in the simulation realistic, the module leaders spent quite a bit of time generating a complete set of fake program documentation. This material consisted of a variety of information, only some of which was actually relevant to the technical project. Each stack of papers consisted of specific project related information including schedules, financial statements, testing results, articles, technical specs, etc. Each stack also contained non relevant information, which was not apparent in the beginning. This information included fake schedules, emails relating to other projects, personal lists, various technical articles, web science comic clippings, etc. In order to make this scenario unique and to ensure the adaptability of each team would be tested, certain material was knowingly withheld and re-inserted later in the simulation timeline.

To make things more difficult and to encourage situational awareness, various elements were inserted into the module at various times. The first insertion came 15 minutes into the sorting phase when the team received a “computerized voicemail” from the President of the United States. This voicemail exposed the groups to potential topics of discussion with the high ranking government official. These hints were carefully crafted to help them in their sorting process but not give away too much information. Critical information was intentionally withheld or garbled through the use of audio filters to ensure the teams worked together to interpret the full message and refocus their sorting efforts as required.

At 25 minutes into the sorting phase, a random handful of material that was intentionally removed from the first stack of papers was provided to each group. The purpose was to illustrate that after the sorting process and methodology had been chosen and implemented, any subsequent material should have been easily sorted, assuming teams continued to follow the process they had developed. The results varied significantly from group to group.

The team was then left to work together and organize their material in a logical format. At the end of the sorting phase, each team had collected all of their material into a 3 ring binder and the presentation and grading phase began.

To begin this new phase, each team described the sorting processes they used in organizing all of the material and how the material was categorized or indexed. After each of the groups had an opportunity to present their finished product to the other team, the teams were asked to swap binders. Each team was provided a short time to review the new binder in order to become familiar with the layout and organization of the finished product.

Each team was then asked to select one or two individuals that would act as the boss and brief the high ranking government officials on the technical project, using the still unfamiliar binder. Each group was forced to utilize the other team's binder during the out brief and was not allowed to use their own material. In addition, the teams were asked to use the material in the binder and not to answer from memory. The module leads acted as the customer and asked specific questions relating to the key areas of focus. The "customer" did not focus their discussion only on the details of the technical project but opened up the conversation by asking very specific and detailed questions about other various topics as well. The ease or difficulty in obtaining answers using the binders provided each group direct feedback on the quality of the binder they had in their possession. When each team had completed their meeting with the customer, the module moved onto the grading phase.

The grading phase was an extremely important part of the module and involved two different types of grading. The first was to provide each team an assessment of their organization abilities. The assessment used the rubric that had been handed out and discussed in great detail during the background phase of the module. The rubric not only measured the quality of the product but it also graded each team on their leadership ability, the processes they used and their adherence to deadlines.

The first assessment was completed by the opposing team who had utilized the binder in their outbrief to the customer. Upon completion of this assessment, the binders and graded rubrics were handed over to the original teams. Each team reviewed the previous assessment and discussed the results in detail as a team. Next, each team had an opportunity to grade their own finished product with the same rubric. This self assessment was designed to illustrate that an introspective assessment can provide vastly different results than the assessment of an outsider. Upon completion of this self assessment, the results were compared and discussed; once again as a team. This led directly into the final phase of group reflection.

The main purpose of the group reflection phase was to ensure that each person had the opportunity to reflect on the simulation they just completed. This was accomplished by asking open-ended questions related to the events throughout the course of the module. Each of the group reflection questions delved into a very deep and detailed discussion on the importance of working together as a team, the criticality of adaptability, and the intrinsic benefits of remembering the big picture.

At the very end of the reflection phase, each participant was encouraged to provide their own assessment and independently review the rubric to determine if there were any dimensions or grading metrics missing from the assessment. They were challenged to make the rubric better by improving the overall assessment; hence empowering them to continue to improve their own abilities far beyond what can be simulated in a weekend retreat.

*What makes the program unique to engineers? Or how do engineers achieve greater benefit?*

The “program” was never meant to be exclusive to just the “professional engineer;” however, a professional engineer is likely to enjoy the greatest benefits. Engineers bridge the gap between science and technology. Science drives the discovery of new ideas and new possibilities. Engineers are there to direct knowledge from scientific discovery into the creation and application of new technology that will have a direct and lasting impact on society. The greater an engineer’s ability to work with groups of others, to work within a team, the greater the opportunity to synthesize larger amounts of information, faster, and into more impactful technologies. There is strength in numbers. Scientific discovery and the creation of new technology do not occur without the most important ingredient, people. Engineers that wish to leave a lasting and magnanimous impact on society may increase their chances for doing so by perfecting their ability to lead – to successfully infuse a common vision within groups of diverse people that will allow them to execute efficiently and successfully towards a common goal, specifically with respect to the creation of new, highly-complex technology. Engineer-leaders have led others to help them create some of the greatest wonders in modern history: the Panama Canal, the Golden Gate Bridge, the Space Shuttle, etc. Where would we be without the engineer-leader?

We’ve established why leadership is so important within engineering. Unfortunately, it is no secret that we are short of leaders that have the ability to bridge the gap, only in this case, we aren’t talking about a technology gap. People come in all shapes and sizes with extremely unique abilities for cognition and creation. The engineer-leader must collate the output of these diverse individuals into a unified product. A simple example that illustrates the gap includes the makeup of a product team; the team could include people who must fulfill roles in finance, marketing, history, law, design, procurement, scientific research, manufacture, maintenance, etc. The ability to effectively communicate is the most important skill that allows an engineer-leader to bridge the gap. The continual development of all leaders, especially engineer-leaders, must include training and development of this most important skill. Therefore, every single LTP offsite has included this element as a means for training our future leaders to bridge the gap.

*What makes the program unique compared to others?*

What other classroom, training, teaching, or educational experience not only encourages, but provides failure as a goal? In school, does one study to pass the test or to fail it? Does the karate master go through months of repetitive, pain staking training so that her pupil will fail to attain the next belt? Failure is a mechanism that signals when a goal has not been achieved; it exposes a limitation and possibly even a weakness in the object attempting to attain the goal. One’s limitations are what continuing education must expose and expand. If one passes a test, there is no measure as to how far one could go. There is only a measure as to how far one has already gone. In order to expand to the fullest extent possible, one must know exactly how far they can go.

Why failure and not success? The only way to know one's true limits is to fail. Only then one knows the ceiling with which one must break through to the other side of greatness, perfection, and strength. We strive to maximize our challenges, we embrace difficult tasks and we conduct feedback and evaluation so we may learn from our failures. We believe that only through successive failure will we grow and become the best leaders possible.

Self-discovery and individual failure are seen as necessary elements of the weekend summit. The objective is to identify one's exact weaknesses. Once identified, weaknesses are converted to strengths through intentional feedback, learning, growth and, ultimately, the assimilation of hands-on experience.

We learned long ago that true leaders can lead from any position in an organization, do not require a formal title or organizational assignment and if empowered, everyone has the opportunity to lead and grow from the experience. An offsite retreat weekend/summit provides different events, activities, and sessions where one serves as a leader, a follower, a teacher, a student and an observer.

Failure is not an option in today's fast paced, cut throat corporate environment. The shareholder has been crowned king due to their ability to make or break large multinational corporations with the stroke of a key. This environment has shown the importance of sound leadership decisions - after all, they can make or break the organization. As a result, formal leadership training programs have become widespread throughout the corporate world, yet questions still remain as to their effectiveness. Can a leadership training program produce truly effective leaders? We believe we have created an opportunity that demonstrates the possibility and have proven it twenty times during the past ten years leading, guiding and developing growing leaders through weekend summits designed to include failure and feedback. Where does an inexperienced professional go to push themselves to the point of failure so that they can determine their exact development needs? The answer lies in an experiential leadership training model that encourages failure.

The difference between the real world and an LTP offsite is that an offsite is a place where the long lasting, tangible effects of negative consequence do not exist. In this regard, what happens at the offsite stays at the offsite. The learning experience, the ability to determine the exact limitations of each individual participant through failure, is what leaves with each participant. The goal is to fail, learn, and grow in a place where consequence cannot take root, so that when the time comes to execute as an engineer-leader in the real world, one can choose where to position the goal so that it is well within limitations. The keyword is choice. Unless one knows their own limitations, they do not have the ability to choose a well informed goal.

*Leadership Roles during an Offsite Weekend Summit*

*Planner / Leader(s) (2-4)*

The planners are the key to the successful creation, development and execution of a leadership weekend summit. Between two and four extreme leaders who have completed their LTP experiences volunteer their time, thoughts and personal visions to create a weekend summit retreat. They spend between six and twelve months creating a theme, developing a program structure, soliciting a cadre of volunteers to assist in the development and execution phases of the program and leading the four day/three night experiential leadership event for up to ninety volunteer participants, coaches, session champions and group coaches.

The efforts are similar to serving as a program manager who has won a project, must select and lead a team of high energy volunteers and execute a successful experiential event consisting of several proven key elements that provide participants with advanced and accelerated leadership development modules based on self-discovery, networking, team building and constant feedback.

Planners and leaders of an offsite weekend have the most at risk in their journey and, at the same time, have the greatest opportunity for personal development and growth through leadership experiences. Beginning with the day they volunteer through the end of the planning, development and execution cycle many obstacles appear. It is through these small failures along the way that Northrop Grumman develops wiser leaders who have faced many obstacles leading to a successful event. When the day of the event comes, it's time to execute and lead others while celebrating as the event comes to life.

#### Planners /Leaders Responsibilities:

1. Create the weekend vision
2. Define and describe the theme
3. Negotiate the budget
4. Develop a plan and schedule
5. Generate content outline
6. Solicit volunteers for logistics & content sessions
7. Invite executive speakers
8. Arrange keynote speakers
9. Execute facility and meal contracts
10. Invite and track attendees
11. Select and train coaches
12. Assemble documentation
13. Host planning meetings and conference calls
14. Manage expectations and last minute changes
15. Execute and lead the event

#### *Content Developers (4-6)*

The content developers serve two roles. They create learning modules based on the vision and theme proposed by the planners and offsite leaders. They also participate in the event to deliver the content and lead the participants through the modules.

Once a topic has been proposed and accepted by the planners, the content developer is on their own to create and present the topic. This becomes an excellent opportunity for the developers to grow in their preparation, presentation skills, content organization and small/large group leadership. Because these developers are empowered to create and present material from their personal experiences and ideas, there is a lot of trust in addition to great diversity of how leadership topics are approached and presented. This adds to the uniqueness of each offsite.

In addition to never repeating a theme, we do not repeat content from one offsite to another. In the leadership development process it's far more about the development and individualistic approach than it is the delivery of specific content or answers to "what is leadership". There has only been one content area that has been used multiple times since the first development as a module. That content area is feedback. Feedback has become an integral part of the offsite experience. It has been presented by different content developers, based on the initial session and consistently improved over the past four years. The feedback process developed at these offsite weekend retreats has been so successful that we have shared it during external conferences for American Society of Engineering Education (ASEE), National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) and Southern Association of Colleges and Employers (SoACE). When committed to personal growth and sharing of successful leadership, unplanned results come out of these leadership developmental programs.

### *Executive Speakers (2-3)*

An important element of the offsite weekend is the personal support and commitment of executive speakers to come and speak at the weekend retreats. The executive team, starting with the sector president has continued to support the events by taking the time to appear at the offsite, deliver a short and inspirational testimonial about his/her leadership journey and remain for hours at a time to interact with the participants. We have been fortunate enough to have two sector presidents appear at the same weekend retreat to demonstrate the cross-sector support for leadership development.

### *Industry Speakers (1-2)*

A bonus for the participants has been the opportunity to meet, listen and network with volunteer speakers from industry and the university settings. These individuals have volunteered their personal time and expenses to share their thoughts of leadership development, offer specific training modules, and even serve as team coaches throughout the weekend.

Industry Speakers (Volunteer time and expenses)	
<i>First Name</i>	<i>Area of Expertise</i>
George	Lobbyist / Defense Acquisition
Mason	Entrepreneurship / Business development
Bob	Student Leadership
Margaret	"True Colors" and motivation
Ted	Naval Post Graduate Leadership
Tim	Cross Sector Communications
Steve	Extreme Leadership
Amanda	Financial / Investment Services
Examples of Commitment to Leadership Development	

#### *Logistics (4-6)*

The logistics team volunteers in the early days were past participants who completed their required two offsites, were looking to further develop their leadership experiences and had thoughts of some day volunteering to develop and lead an entire weekend session. As the years passed, we began to find a number of volunteers who desired to continue their support for the LTP and participate in the weekend. However, many did not have the time to develop content or the desire to lead an entire weekend. A small group of volunteers emerged as engaged individuals ready to support. This group of individuals were similar to “roadies”, who teardown and setup equipment for musical shows. We suddenly had a dedicated and trained set of logisticians for each offsite. Without this cadre of experienced volunteers, the planners and presenters would have to take time away from the planning and preparation of the event.

Logistician Responsibilities
Plan and acquire snacks & supplies
Negotiate and execute catering contract
Manage cleaning tasks and supply materials to sessions
Arrange and execute AV / media needs
Setup and teardown facilities and equipment
Supervise transitions to / from activities
Create video clips and present during meal sessions
Create and manage sleeping arrangements
Assist planners / speakers / presenters as needed
Pack & ship / unpack and distribute materials & supplies

### *Participants (45-60)*

Offsite weekend participants vary in their previous experiences in both the basic classroom sessions and number of offsites attended. Participants have been required to attend two offsites and a number of people actually attend three as a participant. With a new LTP group starting every six months, every offsite includes participants from three or four different LTP Groups which provides greater networking opportunities across groups and work locations.

The participants' responsibilities throughout the weekend are as recipients of information, lectures, speeches and challenges that were developed over the previous twelve months. The more involved the participants become in each activity the more successful the weekend and the greater individual leadership development that occurs.

Scheduled events start with an early morning breakfast, often preceded by organized exercise sessions and conclude late in the night as teams work feverishly to complete challenges and requirements to design the most functional and innovative machines out of simple supplies like wooden dowels, plastic wheels, rubber bands and LEGOs.

Participants are expected to maintain full engagement, share personal experiences with others and work through common goals during challenges, case studies, community service, design-to-build competitions and feedback sessions. These activities occur between 6:00 P.M. on Thursday and 11:00 A.M. on Sunday morning. Few hours are wasted on sleep and relaxation as the participants become fully integrated into their team responsibilities and cherish the opportunities to network and practice leadership sessions.

Offsite Weekend Leadership Summit Participants (Sample Numbers)			
Category	# in Group	% of Attendees (Range)	
		Planners / Leaders	(2-4)
Content Developers	(6-8)	9.0%	8.5%
Logistics Team	(4-6)	6.0%	6.4%
Speakers – Keynote & Content	(2-3)	3.0%	3.2%
Participants	(45 – 60)	67.2%	63.8%
Coaches	(6-12)	9.0%	12.8%
Total # of participants over 20 Summits	(67 – 94)		

### Experiential Leadership Summits Require Significant Personal Investment

Over a ten year period, it was determined that the best range of participants seemed to be six to eight participants per team, two coaches per team, three keynote speakers, six to eight content module/session developers and several opportunities for individual and group feedback. Varying levels of competition, intensity, time for self-reflection and sleep deprivation continue to be evaluated and modified depending on the summit theme and the vision of the program developers/leads.

An important key to the personal development of the planner/leaders is that they have full responsibility to create and develop their own vision for the weekend, theme and content plan. There is an enormous amount of extremely successful projects, presentations, content and examples of design-to-build projects. However, after ten years and twenty offsite weekend summits, no theme or project content other than a well-developed feedback process has been used more than once. For the planner/leaders, their growth comes from the long process of planning a unique experience for their peers and mentors who attend the weekend event. They too have the opportunity to fail and succeed; fear and stress lead to eventual excitement and satisfaction once their weekend journey is complete.

Role Progression at Weekend Offsites	
<i>Category</i>	<i>Total # of Offsites</i>
Participant	(2-3)
Logistics support	(2-4)
Content developer / lead	(3-5)
Team Coach	(1-5)
Planner / Leader	(3-8)

  

Growth & Development through a Variety of Roles
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### *Team Coaches*

Coaches are commissioned to provide feedback to the team and the individual. Coaches observe what participants do well, what they need to work on, and initiate honest discussions about their observations throughout the weekend experiences. The most impactful coaches are those that volunteer time, energy, and passion into each and every participant at an offsite. Over a three year period, a feedback process and documentation was developed that includes instructions, communication aids, feedback forms and examples of effective individual and group feedback.

Coaching requires a great sense and understanding of interpersonal development and communication, since they must continually assess the individual needs of each member on their team to provide feedback – one of the most fundamental ingredients to growth and learning at an experiential offsite. Feedback provides objective and subjective data points for each participant to assess their current behaviors as a leader and team member. Feedback creates a baseline for which a participant can track existing growth and map out future growth, for one cannot determine where to go next without first knowing where one has been and where one is now.

The coach’s role is not to provide answers or guide participants to solutions, rather to allow experimentation, failure and success and only interject to bring the team back to the task at hand or to intervene to ensure safety and initiate conflict resolution techniques as necessary.

It’s often the case that a group of people, diverse in experience and demographic, have a hard time making themselves open to feedback in an extremely short period of time. It can often take years to develop a trusting relationship. However, experience has shown that the offsites are able produce these bonds within hours. It’s all about the setup, specifically the encouragement of a safe learning environment that includes practice of the “golden rule”. The “safe” environment is a catalyst that provides greater opportunity for feedback to occur and to get

absorbed by each participant. When there isn't negative consequence for the discovery of one's weakness, specifically in a public forum, it makes it much easier for one to open the door to one's peers.

As an added benefit, coaches get exposed to the same topics, techniques, and hands-on learning as the participants; thus, they have the opportunity to grow as leaders. The topics from each offsite are easily applied to any company's bottom line; whether it is affordability, efficient decision making, development of business relationships, business and social perception, etc. Furthermore, and just as important, the human network and the bonds formed during the offsites are largely shaped by the coaches that attend. Coaches are there to nurture, challenge and keep the participants engaged in the material. They are there to provide feedback to the offsite leads so that they may shape and adapt the material, on the fly, if needed.

### *Conclusion*

This paper focused on the design, development and execution of a skill based offsite; one that is focused on self-discovery and knowledge acquisition through full immersion into independent modules in search of extreme leadership lessons.

In order to provide an intriguing and valuable experience, a group of passionate individuals worked together to ensure success. Planners imagined a theme and created a vision for the offsite weekend. Content developers were responsible for the development and optimized the planning elements to ensure that all learning objectives and needs were met. Finally, the event was realized through execution during which all other roles participated in order to make the event successful.

The insertion of keynote speakers from various backgrounds and different industries greatly complemented the learning environment by providing first hand experiences from successful individuals in their own disciplines. These special moments, when coupled with the camaraderie built through the weekend with their peers, provided unforgettable lessons that are not easily forgotten.

The planners, content developers, logistics personnel and coaches all have an opportunity to change lives during the execution of these professional development experiences. Each and every individual is passionate and dedicated to the development of these continuous learning experiences for the future leaders of the organization. They are committed to leaving the organization better than when they started, paving the way for the future of Northrop Grumman. They have become part of a legacy, something greater than themselves. They continue to pay it forward, hoping to one day change the world ... one offsite at a time.