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Page 2 How to Navigate Japan's Railway System Train culture runs deep in Japan. But navigating the country's train system can be intimidating, especially to Americans not used to train travel. Fear not: This primer will help you make the most out of Japan's rail network. April 16, 2021 02:48 PM · Page 3 Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own. Entrepreneur Wayne J. Griffin thought he would have little to learn by attending a leadership training program in the summer of 2002 with a bunch of corporate presidents and COOs. "They're great, but at the end of the day, they don't have their own butts on the line the way I do," says the owner of an electrical contracting firm in Holliston, Massachusetts. But during an exercise at Leadership at the Peak, a course offered by the Center for Creative Leadership, in the Colorado Rocky Mountains, Griffin and some cohorts were blindfolded and led by others on a half-mile hike through the woods. Once they reached a clearing, the exercise in dependency and trust continued as the group play-acted the removal of a piece of "radio-active waste" using a ball, a bucket and bungee cords. "I had to give trust to get trust, and even then, the outcome was unknown," recalls Griffin. The experience transformed him. "I realized that my biggest strengths could be some of the company's biggest weaknesses if I didn't properly channel them, because I'm a take-charge guy," says Griffin, 48, founder of Wayne J. Griffin Electric Inc. Now he's quicker to "ask permission" of his employees before making a decision and more likely to delegate important matters to them. "If I can't see that their actions can be positive," he says, "no one will ever develop to succeed me." Immersion training for company chiefs is rapidly gaining currency. Varieties range from the Outward Bound flavor of Leadership at the Peak to instruction in conventional classroom settings. Leading business schools, executive-education start-ups, single-industry trade associations and other entities are developing and operating their own vehicles with a common aim: Give entrepreneurs a dose of battlefield training in leadership, and deliver it in the exclusive fellowship of company-leading peers who are the most likely to appreciate and enhance the experience. "Once someone has owned a company for a while, this is kind of the next step they need to take themselves-and their companies-to the next level," says Howard Stevenson, a Harvard Business School professor and former chair of one of the best-known immersion vehicles for entrepreneurs and CEOs, Harvard University's Owner/President Management (OPM) program. "Many entrepreneurs have other degrees, of course, but beyond the specific or technical skills that got them started, they haven't learned about really running and leading the company." Entrepreneurs often make the best students "because they're more acutely aware of the repercussions" of what they learn, compared with corporate officers, says Leonard Fuld, president of Fuld & Co. Inc., a Cambridge, Massachusetts, company that teaches business owners and corporate executives about competitive-intelligence gathering. Also, entrepreneurs can use such training to make the transition from focusing solely on marketing and expanding the bottom line to embracing "the need for controls and profitability," says William Sihler, a business professor at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville and an expert on small-company turnarounds. "Maybe they can run the business up to \$10 million or \$20 million [in revenues], but if it gets larger, many haven't developed the skills and responsibility to decentralize-and they can get into serious problems and quite possibly fail." Training Pains To be sure, not every business owner is clamoring to partake. In fact, the renowned Darden Graduate School of Business Administration at the University of Virginia planned to offer a series of immersion courses just for entrepreneurs in 2002, but canceled them after paltry enrollment, Sihler says. He and others say executive education has taken a hit over the past couple of years because the sluggish economy has preoccupied company leaders and depleted resources available for such nonessentials. Some experts caution that owners who participate in such programs can fall victim to expectations that are too high. "It's a place to pick up nuggets and do networking," says Noel Tichy, a University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, professor and developer of executive programs for General Electric Co., Ford Motor Co. and others. "But is this going to change the landscape of CEO preparedness? Only if you also think one day of lessons is going to change your game." Yet plenty of entrepreneurs vouch for the value of immersion courses. Sandy Brown took the one-week Course for Presidents & CEOs from the American Management Association (AMA) recently and credits the experience with inspiring her to overhaul everything from her management style to the entire marketing strategy for her company, Elec-Tec Inc., a Valdosta, Georgia-based manufacturer of wire harnesses and circuit boards. Brown, 45, says she decided to take the course after concluding that Elec-Tec's culture had deteriorated. "I wasn't feeling] the exuberance among employees I thought should be there," she says. "Then I realized the exuberance wasn't coming from me." Brown wanted a program that went below the surface. "I wanted a heavy, intense type of program that would allow me to free-think and be in an environment with other people who would have the same concerns I have," says Brown, whose company employs about 65 people and has about \$4 million in annual sales. Brown got what she wanted, and she has applied much of what she learned, especially in evaluating her customers. "We had been in a rut where we were treating all customers and potential customers identically, but I learned that I've got to be more selective and try to generate long-term relationships with customers," Brown explains. Michael Carricarte started his company in Miami in 1986 right after high school and never got a college degree. But after learning about the OPM program at Harvard University, Carricarte, 36, decided to commit to the immersion course that required three consecutive weeks of instruction, three years in a row. The experience "helped me take the company out of just survival mode," says the president of Amedex Insurance Group, which provides major medical policies primarily to clients in Latin America and the Caribbean. "I've been able to take the company to a new level," Carricarte says, "with net growth of 30 or 35 percent between year one of the course and year three." Learning the Ropes These popular courses could teach you a thing or two about being an entrepreneur. Leadership at the Peak Provider: Center for Creative Leadership, Greensboro, North Carolina Phone: (336) 545-2810 Web site: www.ccl.org Cost: \$9,100 Frequency: Several times per year Format: Five-day program to give executives a comfortable environment in which to evaluate their leadership styles and effectiveness, and focus on high-level challenges with peers. Participants build communication skills via simulated TV interviews, participate in hiring role-play, receive a fitness evaluation, and cover ethics, strategy and other topics. Course for Presidents & CEOs Provider: American Management Association, New York City Phone: (212) 556-9100 Web site: www.amanet.org Cost: \$4,500 for AMA members, \$5,000 for nonmembers Frequency: Several times per year Format: Five-day, classroom-based workshop at various sites around the United States. Sessions include creating the future, leading the enterprise, formulating strategy, developing people and driving corporate performance Owner/President Management (OPM) program Provider: Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts Phone: (800) HBS-5577 Web site: www.exed.hbs.edu/programs/opm Cost: \$20,500 annually, for three years Frequency: Once a year, during the summer Format: Three three-week annual sessions on the Harvard campus, with the goal of teaching CEOs to become more effective leaders. Year one lays a foundation, exploring tools for leading an enterprise and developing a better understanding of CEO functions. Year two applies these tools and helps attendees focus on taking their companies to the next level. Year three focuses on developing management and achieving long-term goals. Here's how entrepreneurs make sure that such training is friendly immersion and not baptism by fire: Decide if it's really for you. The answer to this question depends on your life stage, the status of your company and other factors. Other options include less intense or more specialized training. "I wasn't sure I wanted the challenge," says Simone Williamson, 49, president and CEO of Be Our Guest Inc., a Boston-based event organizer, who completed the OPM course after receiving a scholarship from an alumnus. Estaban Neely, 46, believed only an immersion class would be worth his time and attended the AMA program. "This can be a lonely position," says the founder and majority owner of eVerge Group, a Plano, Texas, computer-services firm. "Owners have lots of issues that, a lot of times, managers don't see or feel." Pick "across" or "down." The first choice to make is between a horizontal experience, with other entrepreneurs from many types of businesses, and the vertical sessions offered within many industries. Horizontal vehicles, such as the AMA and OPM programs, tend to be more expensive, more prestigious and better expand a participant's perspective. Many entrepreneurs also vouch for vertical programs run by trade groups and other organizations that have an intimate knowledge of what it takes to succeed in a particular industry. Chuck Williams, 48, recently completed a course called the CEO Academy offered by the Georgia Bankers Association. The co-owner and CEO of North Georgia Bank in Watkinsonville, Georgia, says it was crucial to be immersed with industry peers because "the regulatory aspects we operate under are one of the key distinctions between running a small bank and any other small business." Similarly, the National Pest Management Association (NPMA) offers a \$300 NPMA Academy every year to its members. "It's a great way to network outside my little realm of Abilene, Texas, and find out what people are doing around the country and what I can do to be on the cutting edge," says Patricia Humphrey, 43, president and owner of Lester Humphrey Pest Control Service. Prepare to be humbled. Entrepreneurs may see more kowtowing than anyone else in business because not only do they run the place, but they also own it. The best courses remind owners that they don't know it all. "These professors will bring stuff out that makes you feel maybe you're not so smart," says Amedex's Carricarte. Seek deeper truths. Many enter leadership training believing their most valuable lessons will be in the areas of policies and procedures, but they come away with more fundamental insights that are ultimately more valuable. Brown, for instance, came to understand how the various members of her management team were motivated differently and embraced an idea she previously had avoided: She needed to demand a sense of urgency in some of them-or fire them. Take advantage of being away. The courses offer entrepreneurs a rare chance to disassociate themselves from day-to-day business, and owners who rated their experiences most highly were those who detached themselves the most. Carricarte, for example, says he scheduled about an hour per day to return e-mails and phone calls during his total of nine weeks away from Amedex, but he disciplined himself not to intervene in a significant way in the company's operations during that time. "Last year, they had the company's best-ever month in sales while I was away," he says. "That was a great lesson in itself." Apply the lessons. More important than the immersion experience, of course, are the benefits entrepreneurs and their companies realize once they begin applying the lessons learned. For example, Neely says he has already created new internal focus groups to discuss the company's practices and policies, and then make recommendations to him. Among the resulting actions has been his decision to make eVerge Group's health benefits program more of a cafeteria-style plan so employees can tailor it as closely as possible to their unique needs. Event planner Williamson says that by the end of the Harvard course, she had developed both the understanding and the courage to expand Be Our Guest into another nearby building and to work with one of her partners to finally oust a third partner in the \$4 million business. "I was able to draw on what other people had told me about not creating a job around a person but creating the right job and filling it correctly," she says. "It was invaluable getting exposed to other people and their businesses. I realized that no matter how big they were, we all had similar problems." Ten Hut! Interested in a leadership boot camp? Here's a list of programs to get you started. Advanced Team Concepts : Through workshops and experiential activities, managers learn to be better leaders and teams learn to work together. California Ropes Course : Located in Southern California at the Castle Creek Inn-trust, this program teaches appreciation and communication through a ropes course. Center for Emerging Leadership : This retreat for women seeking to improve their leadership skills also helps participants better understand teamwork, community, work/life balance and more. David Greenberg's Simply Speaking Inc. : Sales and communication skills get a boost as team members make their way through an electronic maze. The Game of Work : This program helps increase leadership and team commitment on the ski slopes in Utah. ImprovEdge! : Participants strengthen their sales, teamwork, leadership and innovation skills through improvised business situations. Leading Concepts : Hands-on military-style training that specializes in teamwork, leadership and communication skill development Team Concepts : Through activities such as rowing, running and bobsledding, team members achieve greater performance, find their "noble purpose" and become inspirational leaders. Unitree : Participants learn teamwork efficiency through horseback riding, archery, yoga, jogging and various other activities. Wharton Leadership Ventures : Wharton School students, graduates and participants in Wharton Executive Education programs learn individual and team leadership skills through such ventures as an Antarctica expedition, Ecuador mountaineering and a Gettysburg battlefield visit. Dale Buss, a former reporter for The Wall Street Journal, is an author, journalist and editorial consultant in Rochester Hills, Michigan.

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