

THE LCG WEAVE & WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

14 Questions for Dr. Franklin C. Ashby



The following is an edited version of an interview with Dr. Ashby conducted in May 2008 by a writer for a private Fortune 500 business publication. The names of several clients and customers have been removed to protect their privacy.

Some background: Every session of the Great Expectations core program is linked to every other session via a unique proprietary design process called *The Weave*. Developed by Dr. Ashby for select Fortune 500 clients, weave leadership programs generate results far beyond those based on traditional building-block methods because of the complex network of “loops” and “links” woven between and throughout the content of every session. Weave designs take considerably longer to write and test than the vast majority of leadership programs in the marketplace today, and can cost a million dollars or more to develop. When combined with comprehensive reinforcement provisions like *Embed* and *Encore* they generate a result of unparalleled quality and value.



Q1: Dr. Ashby, is Great Expectations a “weave” design?

A. *“Yes, it’s the finest and most intricate weave process we’ve done.”*

Q2: Why are complex design methods like *The Weave* necessary?

A. *“The logic is really quite simple. Nobody learns to play golf like Tiger Woods or the piano like Vladimir Horowitz after just a few lessons. It’s just not possible. Like a great education, the acquiring of a solid set of leadership skills takes both time and a process that includes proper doses of good content and instruction, and plenty of practice and reinforcement over an extended period. It’s the latter two items where 99% of the leadership programs in the marketplace today fall far short in my view. A few days, weeks or even months of practice and reinforcement just isn’t enough. American secondary students invest about 800 hours of classroom time and homework time in each major subject area from the beginning of Grade 7 to the end of Grade 12. Doesn’t it make sense to invest at least that much in the building of critical life and leadership skills?”*

Here’s a look at a Fortune 500 study involving managers and executives in two separate management development programs. The first program was designed using the LCG weave process and contained eight sessions and 32 contact hours of core program training, plus a 4 month reinforcement phase. The

second program contained the exact same eight core program sessions, but without the weave design and without a reinforcement phase. Surveys were conducted using 100 randomly selected participants from both (total of 200 participants) programs.”

Note: The study data was processed using the Phillips 5-Step ROI Assessment Process, and all findings are estimates of the benefits and returns for the first year (post-program) only. Results are rounded to the nearest whole number. Because all programs were delivered by corporate university faculty members of the host (Fortune 500) client, the fully-loaded cost of both programs was substantially lower than comparable programs at major university centers and via major for-profit providers. The fully-loaded cost of the weave program was estimated at \$3,280 per participant, including materials and delivery. The fully-loaded cost of the non-weave program was estimated at \$2,450 per participant, including materials and delivery. Both programs were conducted on-site at client facilities.

MEASUREMENT LEVEL	WEAVE	NON-WEAVE
IA. SATISFACTION (“met” expectations)	100%	97%
IB. SATISFACTION (“exceeded” expectations)	93%	63%
II. LEARNING / RETENTION (avg test score)	96/100	80/100
III. APPLICATION	100%	77%
IV. IMPACT	98%	73%
V. RETURN ON INVESTMENT (to client org.)	4,660%	830%

“As we see, the program designed using weave design methodology delivered far greater results and a much bigger ROI than the program using the traditional design methodology. The measures of satisfaction (1A & 1B) were based on survey responses to the standard Level I instrument used by LCG facilitators. All learning and retention data was gathered using a 50 question pencil-and-paper test prepared by LCG. All application, impact and ROI data was collected and processed via the standard Phillips Level III, IV and V procedures.”

Q3. How could a training program generate a return-on-investment of 4000%? It seems ridiculous. Even 830% seems extremely high and unlikely.

A. *“It does seem pretty unlikely, doesn’t it? But it’s really not, especially when working with a group of senior managers and executives at a big pharmaceutical company. ROI is a measure of the return, typically expressed in monetary terms, generated by an investment of some type. In this case, the study found that a total of \$4,891,136 was either saved or generated by the 32 members participating in the management development process based on weave technology. That amounts to an average of \$152,848 per participant, or 4,660% in total return (ROI) once the \$104,960 (\$3280 per person, fully-loaded) invested by the company in the program is factored in properly. In truth, although impressive-sounding, it’s really not unusual for a senior executive managing a major department in a Fortune 500 company to save or generate hundreds of thousands of dollars, or even many millions of dollars, via the organizing and cost-saving strategies we teach. The \$152,848 contributed on average by each class participant in this particular instance is actually much lower than that reported by most corporate classes we do.”*

Q4. What prompted you to create your first weave design?

A. *“Dr. Victoria Marsick, my faculty advisor at Columbia University, was the first to start me thinking about ways to dramatically improve the long-term benefits of adult training programs. At the time I had just become the vice president of instruction and chief educational officer at Dale Carnegie & Associates, Inc., and I was looking for ways to help Dale Carnegie instructors have an even greater impact on their class members. Dr. Marsick is an expert in learner drive and motivation, and the extent to which informal and incidental learning contributes to learner retention rates. Her lectures and encouragement helped me see the incredible impact small, often imperceptible reinforcements and indications of approval can have on learner motivation and retention. That eventually led to my own teaching and training process called ‘Subtle Signals’, and then the first full-blown weave design several years later. Like most learning theories, the first weave evolved over several years and through several stages before arriving at the point it’s at today. I’m just glad I had access to someone like Victoria Marsick when I did.”*

Q5. Do you feel that “non-weave” programs are a waste of time and money?

A. *“No, not at all. The results for class members in this instance are actually very good. However, I clearly feel strongly that any program designed to build new skills needs to include a quality, post-program reinforcement phase delivered over a long enough period of time to truly cement new habits. Beyond that, I do think it’s fair to mention that every ROI study our clients have done since 1998 has consistently found that weave designs generate a dramatically better result for class members, and a dramatically higher ROI for clients. I truth, I have no doubt that the ROI generated by the weave program in this example would actually have been considerably higher had the reinforcement phase been lengthened. I would have preferred to see an entire year of reinforcement, delivered in perhaps bi-weekly sessions over a full 12-month period.”*

Q6. How do you feel about the two-day and three-day leadership programs that dominate the market right now? Are they a waste of time and money?

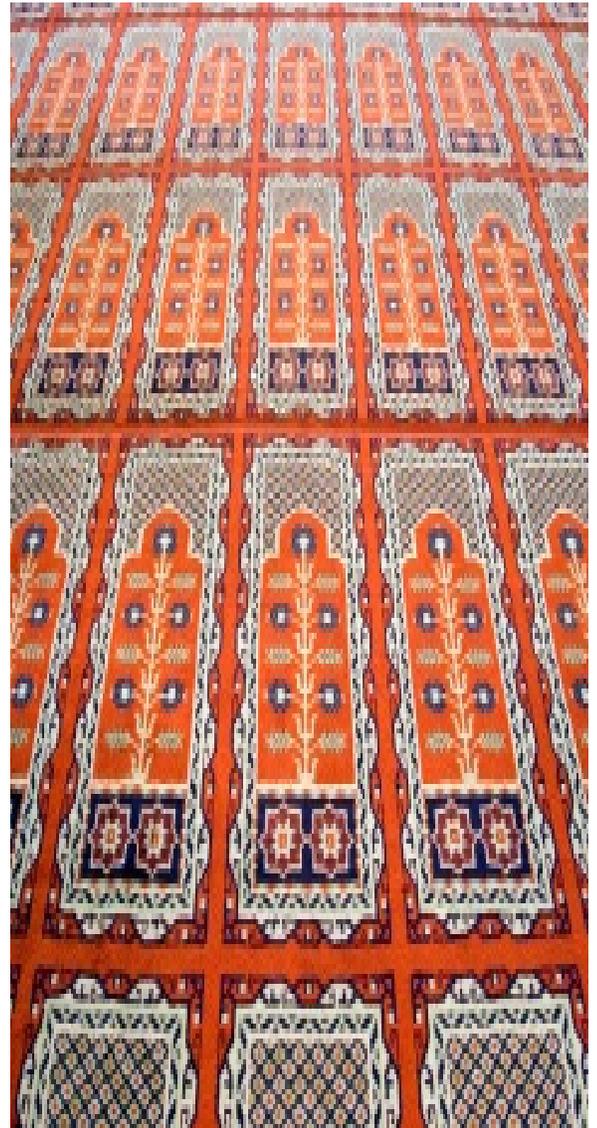
A. *“It all depends on what you’re trying to accomplish. Can they help create a greater appreciation for good leadership habits? Yes, absolutely. Do they result in the developing of leadership skills? No, they do not.”*

Q7. Why then are short courses, workshops and programs so popular?

A. *“In truth, they’re really not popular at all within top corporate universities today where the focus is on measurable, sustainable results. Most of the companies I work with don’t even offer them. Research shows that those who buy short programs and workshops do so most often because they’re convenient and inexpensive, and occasionally because they’re held in attractive settings. In my view, all the advertising and such in the trade journals has fooled a lot of people into thinking they’re getting something of real value, when actually they’re not. It’s the same effect as a couple of days of dancing lessons, or a handful of lessons in one of the martial arts. The lessons may be fun and interesting, but there’s really no lasting benefit generated.”*

Q8. What about semester-length programs?

A. *“Well, they’re generally better but still only a small part of what’s needed; just like a semester-length course in math or science, or any other involved subject. It’s a good start, but far from what’s required to really master things. Beyond that, the trouble with semester-length skill development programs in particular is the ‘regressing’ that happens when the reinforcement piece is absent or left to chance. We call it the ‘withering effect.’ Once the 3 months or so of training ends, you’re done - - despite all the evidence that old habits start re-emerging in just a matter of weeks. Withering is simply an unavoidable consequence of shortening up a process that needs time and diligence to be effective. I became aware of how truly vital continuous reinforcement is during my research for **DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS** and **REVITALIZE YOUR CORPORATE CULTURE**. The world’s best companies all know it. Again, just think about what happens to professional athletes and performers when they stop practicing and working out. Their skills get rusty, right? They stop doing things easily and automatically out of habit. It’s the same with leadership skills.”*



Q9. So what are the main pieces of an LCG Weave Design?

A. *“We’ve been building and honing the strategies and formulas we use for many years, so even if I was allowed to discuss the metrics we use it would be impossible to provide a thorough understanding in a single 60-minute conversation. But here’s a pretty good overview of things.*

Like all good training designs, weave designs begin at the end. The initial focus is on the outcomes we’re trying to create, and the extent to which each desired outcome is dependent on one or more other outcomes. After that we look at the particular skills that need to be developed and how they’re best divided into two groups (foundation skills and building-block skills), and then divided again into dozens of supporting sub-skills and sub-capabilities.

*Here’s an example: In **Great Expectations** the two foundation skills are self-confidence and self-esteem. They warrant that distinction because none of the other nine skills we build during the process can be developed properly without them. Public speaking ability is an example of a building-block skill because of its dependence on self-confidence and self-esteem, and also because it provides a platform for the developing of several sub-skills, notably improved concentration skills and improved thinking abilities.*

LCG designers think of the collection of outcomes they need to generate as a great tapestry held together and made strong by a collection of individual program components (skills and sub-skills), and a

thousand or more “loops” and “links.” A loop is a deliberate revisiting of some earlier content piece or lesson to reinforce or build-upon it. A link is the connection between one developmental aspect of the training and another. Once all of the outcomes for a particular design are determined, and all of the foundation, building-block and supporting sub-skills are identified, all of the skills are then “weighted” via a special process to determine how best to place and emphasize each in the core program. Once that’s accomplished, the effort to weave everything together into a tight, inspiring, high-impact training process is started using the formulas I mentioned, and hundreds of loops and links.

The Great Expectations process delivers 33 high-value outcomes over a multi-year period via the developing and reinforcing of 10 key leadership skills and 166 sub-skills and sub-capabilities. A total of 2,160 loops and links, some obvious some very subtle, are built into the 24-session core program, each fashioned from a weighted average and one or more proprietary formulas. It is by far the finest, most complete and most beneficial weave process ever constructed, bar none.”

Q10. You say Great Expectations is actually a process within a process? How is that?

A. “That’s a good question. Pretty much everything I’ve said to this point



refers to the process at work within the 24-session core program. But there’s another process at work, too. A larger process that encompasses the entire multi-year period. Here’s a good way to think of it: Imagine for a moment Great Expectations class members traveling in two related but independent orbits, much like people on the earth do as the planet rotates on its axis and also around the sun. Students involved in the Great Expectations core program travel through the 24 core sessions in a reasonably steady, predictable way. Yet at the same time they’re also participating in a larger process, one with seven (7) stages and a whole separate set of purposes. This process-within-a-process is another of the unique features of Weave designs, and another one of the major reasons weaves are so remarkably powerful, and so remarkably results-producing and results-sustaining.”



Q11. Can you tell us a bit more about the seven (7) stages?

A. “Yes, of course. Students aren’t necessarily aware of it, but the 24-session Great Expectations core program is actually divided into 3 levels of intensity and expectation, each containing 8 consecutive sessions. All weave designs have a kind of firewall around clumps of sessions to help both students and facilitators stay supremely focused and intent on exceeding the goals and objectives of not only every session, but every clump of sessions.

The first eight sessions of the core program are called the Initial Core Sequence. Representing Stage 1 of the overall process, the purpose here is the initial building of the foundation skills, along with several sub-skills and sub-capabilities.

Stage 2 is comprised of sessions 9-16, and is known as the Intermediate Core Sequence. Here expectations for students are raised and new, more sophisticated skills and skill sets are introduced. Stage 2 is typically a time when dramatic growth in several course-related areas starts occurring for class members.

Stage 3 is comprised of sessions 17-24, and is known as the Closing Core Sequence. Here student performance expectations are raised again, with emphasis on the cementing of new habits, the mastering of higher-order skills, and the practical, real-world application of all skills.

Stage 4 is called the Initial Embed Reinforcement Sequence. It typically includes between 24 and 104 weeks of weekly or bi-weekly 2-hour reinforcement sessions. The Embed phase routinely includes a significant focus on college readiness skills and requirements, as well as heightened expectations, longer student talks, larger groups, the ongoing reinforcing of habits and skills, a broadening of applications, and the establishing of permanent, embedded habits.

Stage 5 is called the Encore Reinforcement Sequence. This unique feature of the Great Expectations process involves the re-taking of the core (24-session) program by students, typically in their junior or senior year of high school, and the highest expectations yet. Stage 5 is a time when foundation skills, building block skills and all sub-skills are revisited, refined and polished in a way that makes them both permanent and truly extraordinary. It is during Stage 5 that true mastery of all of the skills and skill sets a part of the Great Expectations process is accomplished, setting the stage for the two final stages in the process.



Stage 6 is called the Class Assistant Sequence, and is reserved only for top-performing participants. Here outstanding members of Stage 5 classes go through the 24 core sessions a third time, but this time in an elevated leadership and co-teaching capacity. Stage 6 provides those selected as class assistants a marvelous opportunity to gain college-level teaching and coaching experience while still in high school, while also “role modeling” for those further back in the process the level of poise, confidence, communications skills and leadership skills able to be achieved.

Stage 7 is called the Closing Embed Reinforcement Sequence. Open to all core program graduates, this stage continues right through the high school graduation of each participant and provides a wealth of ongoing speaking and co-leading opportunities, plus all of the skill development and reinforcement a part of the initial Embed phase.”

(Note: More details about the 7 stages of the Great Expectations process can be found in the **New & Noteworthy** section of the Great Expectations website, www.greatexpectationsforteens.com.)

Q12. You mentioned that all of the skills and sub-skills in Great Expectations are “weighted”. Can you say more about that?

A. “The point here is that not all of the skills developed during the Great Expectations process are of equal value to participants. And not all are equally hard to master. So we need to make adjustments to be sure the most important and most difficult get the attention and emphasis they need. Here’s an

example: Clearly the building and reinforcing of sufficiently high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem is central to everything we do in Great Expectations, and a part of every single session, either directly or indirectly. Of the 2,160 loops and links in the Great Expectations core program, 512 are focused at building or solidifying the self-confidence and self-esteem of class members. That's about 25% of the total, all because of both the importance of self-confidence and self-esteem, and also the difficult time many teenagers have developing and sustaining sufficient levels. By contrast, there are only 33 links and loops dealing with the appearance and demeanor of class members; partly because it's less important in the grand scheme of things, but also because experience shows it's a fairly easy "skill set" to build-upon and master once a good foundation (i.e. sufficient levels of self-confidence and self-esteem) is in place."

Q13. Will you be coming out with any new weave designs for public consumption?

A. "Yes, as a matter of fact we'll be coming out with our new The Great Expectations Program for Working Adults in about a year or so. It's going to be fantastic, the best process ever of its kind, and I'm really very excited about it! We'll be adding details to our website, www.greatexpectationsforteens.com, in the coming months so I hope your readers will make it a point to keep checking in with us."



Q14. Is there anything more you'd like to add?

A. "Just a couple of final thoughts. Otherwise, I think we've covered things pretty well. Leadership training is a \$12B/yr. industry in the United States right now, with 99% of the investment going to adult managers and executives. I believe that's very wrong, and I believe correcting it and bringing things into better balance will have one of the most powerful and profound effects on American education in decades.

Our kids share in only about 1% of the total investment each year because no one is out there making an issue of the recent NACAC study, and all of the other evidence showing the huge contribution quality leadership training makes to college readiness and work readiness efforts. It's just crazy that we keep letting a solution so important, and so remarkably inexpensive go ignored. Parents need to start insisting their local schools bring better balance to the acquiring of critical knowledge and the acquiring of critical skills during middle school and high school. It's as simple as that. And school boards and community leaders need to join the chorus. It's really important, because nothing is going to happen until they get involved. Clearly, I believe Great Expectations is the ideal solution. It's easy to administer, inexpensive, and a truly unique and world-class product. But if schools prefer to design their own programs, that's fine. We'll even help them if we can. The key is getting it done. And the sooner the better." [END]