

Dropbox Scales Personalized Coaching for Human-Centered Leadership

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A Fast-Moving Technology Company

Dropbox is a cloud-based file-hosting service operated by Dropbox, Inc., headquartered in San Francisco, California. After repeatedly forgetting his USB flash drive, Drew Houston was motivated to cofound the company in 2007. Today, more than 700 million people use Dropbox across 180 countries.

Dropbox is designed to support users with an easier way of sharing all types of information. The company is growing rapidly, both organically and through various acquisitions to complement its offering, which includes file-sharing for videos, photos, and document-signing capabilities. The heart of this growth is powered by the nearly 2,700 employees, who are supported by the leadership, inspiration, and guidance from their senior leaders.

Building a Better Future and a More Equitable World

The way the company operates and creates value for its customers is reflected in Dropbox's approach to leadership development: a drive for simplicity, relentless focus on the customer, and a goal to create equity and inclusion.

“We have a responsibility to create a more sustainable and equitable world. The mission at Dropbox is to design a more enlightened way of working—and we're committed to achieving our sustainability goals, investing in social-good initiatives, and being a force for positive change.”

Drew Houston
Cofounder and CEO

Summary

Challenge

- Maintaining a strong culture through acquisitions and organic growth.
- Scaling Dropbox's high-impact, personalized coaching practice and finding a model to fit the company's approach to coaching as an internally run, strategic practice.
- Managing coaching programs and gaining insights with constrained resources.

Solution

- Dropbox selected Coaching.com, a platform to manage and scale the access and impact of its coaching programs.
- The executive development team worked with HR business partners and leaders to provide insights about the use and impact of coaching in their groups.

Results

- The company's top 200 leaders receive coaching suited to their unique development needs (85% uptake).
- Key insights on quality, utilization, spend, and satisfaction with coaches drive business decisions on future use.
- Insights on current leadership development needs drive future programming.
- The scalable solution is ready to expand throughout the entire company to further democratize coaching.

Personalized, Scalable, High-Impact Leadership Development

Reese Haydon joined Dropbox in 2019 as senior manager of executive development and was tasked with developing the company's top 200 leaders and their teams. Partnering with the People Team and across the company, he embarked on a journey to define a path for developing the skills and capabilities needed to lead the company today, and into the future.

“Executive development here includes everything from coaching to executive assessments, team development, and organizational consulting. We think about how we’re supporting not only individual leaders but also the teams of leaders around them, and how they’re achieving our business goals and bringing our strategy to life,” explained Haydon.

Coaching at the Heart of Leadership Effectiveness and Transformation

The team has various programs and solutions for different leaders, including online content, workshops, classroom-based training, and collaborative learning.

“Coaching really underlies all of these areas: development, interventions, and team effectiveness,” said Karlee Pierce, executive and team development lead.

Dropbox leadership sees diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as a core competence and business necessity for sustainable success, and leaders play a key role in it (see Figure 1).

“Coaching for us is a transformational lever,” explained Haydon. At key career inflection points—early move to people leader, a move to more senior leadership, in certain leadership programs—external perspectives and coaching are key. “Coaching can serve as the catalyst to accelerate learning and growth.”

One-Size Doesn’t Fit All: Hand-Curated Coaches from Various Sources

For executive development, the team at Dropbox casts the net well beyond their executive population (VP and above), going down to senior managers as the pipeline for future leaders of the company.

“We believe in finding the right coach for every person and their situation. It’s a really high-touch matching process that we do internally, so we don’t outsource this to a vendor or technology,” Haydon continued. “As we are close to the leaders we support, and understand their style, their development areas and strengths, their preferences, we can help make a much more effective match.”

Figure 1: Dropbox Commitment to DEI

We all have a role to play in building a better future



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Our philosophy on DEI is to build an employee base reflecting the diverse customers we serve globally. Learn more in our [Annual Diversity Report](#).



Workforce Development

We partner with organizations, like [Next Chapter](#), to run apprenticeship programs that create pathways into tech for software engineers with non-traditional CS backgrounds.



Dropbox for Good

We empower our employees to give back to their communities by providing paid volunteer time off, matching donations, and making product donations to nonprofits.



Ethical Business Conduct

Our [Worldwide Code of Business Conduct and Ethics](#) requires everyone who works at Dropbox to adhere to our ethical standards. We review our code and policies regularly.

Source: Dropbox, 2022

So rather than going to one coaching vendor, the team hand-selects each coach specifically for the executive it will support, considering culture fit, coaching capabilities, specific needs of the executive, availability, and more. The results are meaningful for the executives and coaches alike.

Essentially, Haydon and his team function as an internal coaching practice, running every aspect in-house: coach selection, deployment, agreements, matching, tracking, analytics, and embedding in broader development programs.

Scaling a High-Impact Internal Coaching Practice

As the company grew rapidly, tracking, management, and analytics on spreadsheets became increasingly challenging. “We were always wondering what was happening, were we making an impact, were we getting the most value out of the experience of coaching, how much time investment it was, and what bottom line results we got,” said Pierce.

Traditional coaching vendors offer analytics and platforms, but that model didn’t fit Dropbox’s approach to coaching as an internally run, strategic practice. While Dropbox was partnering with coaches from various companies, it needed a vendor-agnostic solution to centralize data from all coaching vendors and standardize processes like scheduling, goal-planning, and coaching progress tracking.

A Vendor-Agnostic Coaching Management Platform

The executive development team explored different coaching management solutions and decided on Coaching.com, a platform that enables enterprises, coaching companies, and coaches to manage and scale the access and impact of coaching (see Figure 2).

“It works well for us because it is easy to use, it’s vendor agnostic across different coaching companies, and it allows executives and coaches to focus on the coaching, not on the tool,” explained Haydon.

Figure 2: Coaching.com’s Vendor-Agnostic Coaching Management Platform



Source: Coaching.com, 2022

As the team rolled out the platform across all its coaching programs, it was a requirement for coaches but optional for the leaders. “We didn’t want leaders to have to focus on a tool unless they found it useful. Some people love using it, and others just go to their coaching sessions,” explained Haydon.

A New Management System to Scale

Using the platform has given the executive development team a solid management system to govern contracts, evaluate spend, and report on utilization. “We were struggling with spreadsheets, and now everything is well organized and ready to go for us,” said Pierce.

The ability to manage the coaching practice effectively has been a game-changer for the Dropbox team. Efficiency, better utilization of coaches, insights on goal accomplishments, and engagement-tracking are all important.

“The platform allows us to move a lot faster and be more efficient with our resources because we have limited resources on the HR team,” said Haydon.

And the team can now provide standardized reports to the HR business partners to keep them informed of coaching progress as well as key topics for their client groups so HRBPs can support them even better.

Human-Centered Leadership in a Postpandemic World

Beyond basic management capabilities, the team identified another strategic use of the platform: to get insights into leadership topics and requirements over time.

“Knowing what topics are on our leaders’ minds really helps us calibrate our leadership development offerings and support leaders with what they need most urgently now,” said Haydon.

Haydon and Pierce observed a notable change in priorities for leaders over the last two years. Using the platform helped them get aggregate insights on the topics executives discussed with their coaches in an anonymized format (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Leadership Requirements in a Postpandemic World

Prepandemic Topics <i>Leadership Fundamentals</i>	Today's Topics <i>Human-Centered Leadership</i>
How do I manage my team?	How do I become more resilient?
How do I inspire them?	How do I take care of myself?
How do I manage performance?	How do I make sure my team is okay?
How do I motivate them?	How do I manage my team's mental health?
How do I build executive presence?	How do I care authentically?

Source: Dropbox, 2022

“Getting these insights would not have been possible using spreadsheets. It helps us support our leadership in a much more responsive way,” said Haydon.

The Future: Democratizing Coaching

The hand-curated, customized, and personalized approach to coaching is working very well now that the team has a coaching management system to support and scale it. Leaders are getting incredible value out of coaching to help them grow personally, professionally, and lead their teams more effectively.

In the future, Dropbox wants to scale coaching even further into the organization. “For us, everybody is a leader. How coaching can support all employees in leading the Dropbox way is always top of mind for us,” said Pierce.

To follow up with this idea, the executive development team is experimenting with an internal program called “Coaches Corner,” using internal HR people to provide coaching, which the coaching platform supports as well. Over time, early career coaching for entry-level Dropboxers and anybody who needs coaching on demand is on the team’s roadmap.

“Custom, personalized coaching has been a game-changer for us, and over time we want to make it available for everybody in the company,” said Haydon. Using Coaching.com as the vendor-agnostic coaching management platform to scale coaching and derive insights about leadership development needs, this vision is within reach.

About the Authors



Josh Bersin

Josh founded Bersin & Associates in 2001 to provide research and advisory services focused on corporate learning. He expanded the company's coverage to encompass HR, talent management, talent acquisition, and leadership and became a recognized expert in the talent market. Josh sold the company to Deloitte in 2012 and was a partner in Bersin by Deloitte up until 2018.

In 2019, Josh founded the Josh Bersin Academy, a professional development academy that has become the "home for HR." In 2020, he put together a team of analysts and advisors who are now working with him to support and guide HR organizations from around the world under the umbrella of The Josh Bersin Company. He is frequently featured in publications such as *Forbes*, *Harvard Business Review*, *HR Executive*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *CLO Magazine*. He is a popular blogger and has more than 800,000 followers on LinkedIn.



Kathi Enderes, PhD

Kathi is the vice president of research at The Josh Bersin Company; she leads research for all areas of HR, learning, talent, and HR technology. Kathi has more than 20 years of experience in management consulting with IBM, PwC, and EY and as a talent leader at McKesson and Kaiser Permanente. Most recently, Kathi led talent and workforce research at Deloitte, where she directed many research studies on various topics of HR and talent and frequently spoke at industry conferences. Originally from Austria, Kathi has worked in Vienna, London, and Spain and now lives in San Francisco. Kathi holds a doctoral degree and a master's degree in mathematics from the University of Vienna.

The Josh Bersin Company Membership

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For more details, contact us at info@bersinpartners.com.