

# CASE STUDY: STEVE WATTS

**How one seasoned senior executive proves that a commitment to personal development is the key to making tangible progress in the quest to become an exceptional leader -- and develop an exceptional team.**

*"Somebody promoted me — and it was cruelly crazy!"*

That's how my client and Leading to Learn Accelerator program alum, Steve, describes his step up the career ladder when he was first promoted to a senior executive position years ago. However, despite initially feeling overwhelmed and consciously incompetent in his new leadership role, over the years Steve has proven himself to be a thoughtful, dedicated, and truly excellent leader.

As the COO of California construction firm Walter & Wolf, Steve is committed to continuing to develop himself as a leader so that he can better develop and prepare his people as they too progress in their careers.

Knowing that even the best athletes have coaches, Steve felt he'd benefit from having a guide to help him grow and progress as he attempted to unlock another level of leadership excellence. He reached and engaged me to support him with coaching for him and a direct report.



## **From coaching client to Leading to Learn Accelerator participant.**

Several years later, always keen to continuously improve, Steve was interested in the Leading to Learn Accelerator program to deepen his leadership skills and learn alongside an international group of other committed leaders.

However, as excited as he was to build on the work we'd already done, he was initially unsure about how he'd manage to balance his existing commitments and dedicate enough time to the course.

He decided to join the Accelerator and happily was able to make the Accelerator work for him by combining self-paced learning with the program's live components, attending around half of the live coaching sessions and catching up with the other half at his convenience. While he describes enjoying the live sessions, he also appreciated the different benefits that the recorded coaching sessions provided. He explains:

*"When you're in it, you're trying to respond, think, and answer questions. But when you're offline, it gives you more time to think it through."*

He found himself looking forward to grabbing his headphones, hitting play on the next recording, heading out for a walk, and reflecting on the content as he went.

## Leading with intention.

One of the most significant changes Steve describes making to his leadership approach since the Accelerator program is to practice intentional daily and weekly reflections.

Every Monday begins by determining what he wants to achieve during the week, setting his intentions, and deciding how he wants to show up as a leader. Then, each day, and more thoroughly on a Friday, he'll reflect and conduct a mini progress report.

He's discovered that:

*"It's a key thing to try to be intentional when you go into your day or you go into a meeting. It's just that idea of looking at my day and thinking, 'Okay, well, I'm going to have these interactions today. How do I want to show up?'"*

Of course, he knows that not every interaction goes as planned and we don't always show up in the way we had hoped. He now appreciates more fully how articulating your intention -- identifying the behaviors that align with your purpose -- in each interaction, and reflecting on what you learned when something didn't go as you planned, is key to accelerating your improvement as a leader -- and as a person.

## Learning to ask the right questions.

Learning to ask the right questions has been a huge aspect of putting Steve's commitment to leading with intention into practice.

He explains that in the construction industry,

*"Command and control are dominant. I think the most common thing is for people to either ask a question they already know the answer to or they're not really that curious of the answer you're going to give."*

In fact, I'd argue that's a pretty common leadership habit whatever industry you're in. Unfortunately it's one that constantly places the burden of problem solving firmly on the shoulders of leaders, and deprives others of developing the skills they need to do their own troubleshooting.

Steve's now taking a different approach, one that will help empower the people he works with: balancing setting direction with providing support through asking questions.

## Model the behavior you want to grow.

A key aspect of my teaching approach is to model behavior and label it in the moment, and Steve appreciated how I did that in the Accelerator coaching sessions. He told me:

*"There was a moment where somebody asked you a very specific question and you said 'Well, I have some ideas around that. But before I get into that, what have you tried so far?' And they had to come out with their answers...and discovered that they already had the answer within themselves. That was really great modeling."*

Inspired by this approach, Steve feels he's also getting better at asking strategic questions — and at holding back when his team members ask him questions so they have the opportunity to engage in their own problem-solving. He knows that by improving his own skills, he can model the behaviors he wants to see in others and create the culture of improvement and respect for people that he wants to cultivate.

## **Becoming consciously competent.**

The biggest breakthrough over the two-month Accelerator program, by far, is the feeling that he's making a shift from, as he describes it, "unconscious incompetence to conscious incompetence" — and even "conscious competence" is now very much in reach.

Even on those days when he doesn't quite show up in the way he wanted to, or he wishes he'd done something differently, he now has an increased awareness that doesn't just alert him to the fact that things didn't go to plan, it provides him with direction on how to get it right next time.

And that, he says, is huge because it's the first vital step to tangible progress.

And he appreciates the different perspective I bring to leaders wanting to create a continuous improvement culture:

*"Lean can be very tools oriented but you bring a lot more of the people side of things: how people interact and how you can get things done with other people. You bring a lot of humanity to it. And that's a great feature."*

# Can you relate to Steve?

*If you feel like you're struggling with your own form of leadership gap and want to learn the skills you need to become a more capable and confident leader, whether individually or as part of a leadership team, you'll find more information on the [Leading to Learn Accelerator Course here](#).*

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## Collaborate With Katie

Feel like this could be your team? Collaborate with Katie to meet the needs of your organization and your team. From delivering learning experiences such as custom keynote addresses and interactive workshops to empowering your leaders through coaching and group programs, Katie looks forward to inspiring, energizing, and supporting your team to lead with intention!

Explore her course options, including the Leading to Learn Accelerator [here](#), and start on your journey of intentional leadership with Katie today.

