



Re-thinking my Leadership

The ASPIRE Journey From a Participant's Perspective

Before embarking on the ASPIRE leadership journey, I was familiar with feedback from participants of other GAIA Insights programs: “**Life-changing**”, “**powerful**”, “**long-lasting**”. Big words and emotions – I was curious. Not being familiar with the provider, but having attended a range of leadership development programs in the past, I had certain ideas of what to expect.

The program was co-created with the GAIA Insights team, who worked with a selection of experts to support the desired outcomes to improve **self-leadership, teamwork and company culture**.

Internal feedback had highlighted a special need for our team to enhance **trust and collaboration**, for long-term success. In addition, our company was undergoing a **cultural transformation** towards a horizontal organization and the ASPIRE program was intended to support this transition.

The journey started in April 2020, and was scheduled to run for 14 months. The latter was rather surprising to all participants, as none of us had ever attended such a long program. And honestly, it was a bit daunting.

The ASPIRE program included bi-weekly webinars, expert sessions, large and small group interactions, individual and team exercises, personal assessments, journaling, as well as voluntary coaching.

Originally, the journey also included three one-week live modules, which ended up being replaced by virtual experiences due to COVID-19 restrictions. We were fortunate to be able to anchor the program in a GAIA Insights-facilitated team off-site that had taken place shortly before the pandemic hit.

In hindsight, I am grateful because **both the live and virtual experiences were both unique and powerful**. The on-site experience, set in a boutique hotel in Morocco, was intense, touching and insightful.

Besides many cognitive learnings, I will always remember the impact of sustained high-performance routines such as the workouts and brain food that kept me perfectly fueled throughout the long days, without ever craving for a coffee. A learning that I have taken on board - for life.

Leading From Within

For me, the entire ASPIRE program was an incredibly well-orchestrated journey of physical, mental, emotional and interpersonal challenges and experiences.

They have left me with a different perspective about myself and my skills, my direct reports and peers, as well as my personal environment.

And yes, there were times when I found it hard to complete the exercises and homework we were given because I was “too busy” with my daily work and private life. Looking back, at times I wish I would have made **more space to be more present**. But that’s when reality kicks in, and that’s okay as well.

Overall, ASPIRE was a real journey and if anyone ever asks me **why a leadership development program should run for more than just a few months**, I’ll know the answer: If you want to flourish as a leader, you need to look at yourself before looking at others. Moreover, if you want to get this right, take all the time you can to grow, practice and be the best leader you can possibly be: Your authentic self.

Without this program, as a team and company we would not have been able to navigate the changes COVID inflicted on us.

This particular challenge demonstrated even more how invaluable a psychologically safe, strong and empowering company culture is, carried by individuals who are self-aware and know how to lead and inspire others. **The impact it has on the power of innovation and resilience is priceless.**



For the virtual modules, GAIA Insights also did a stellar job in not only transferring the face-to-face curriculum, but maintaining the quality of learning and intensity of interaction similar to what we had experienced previously in Morocco.

And for me, personally, having been coached and challenged, having reflected and cried, learned and laughed – I am now next in line to say: **“This was a life-changing experience and it made me a better person and leader.”**

Authored by an ASPIRE participant, 2021

More information:

Contact Justine Benson or James Salter to find out how your organization can benefit from ASPIRE at transforming.leaders@gaia-insights.com

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