Introduction

This case story from Business School Lausanne (BSL), based in Switzerland, provides an example of how personal development (developing the leader in the person and the person in the leader) can be approached and integrated at each level of education, from bachelor, master, MBA, and executive education to doctoral programmes.

Challenges

- Is it possible to “force” students to reflect on their personal leadership development at the early age of a bachelor programme (years 19-22)?
- What happens if we include topics of personal leadership in the Master of Finance programme?
- Can we translate the successfully personal development practices we have established in the past 4 years in the MBA and EMBA programmes across to other educational levels?
- How will doctoral candidates react if we include personal development into the curriculum; can we sell this successfully?

Actions taken

We have asked our teaching faculty of the MBA and EMBA programmes to develop with us relevant courses for the bachelor level, and we have decided to fly these professors in to teach these courses. This is unusual, as we usually reserve such actions to executive programmes.

We have worked with the Chair of the Finance programme and have reflected together with high level executives in the finance and banking industry about the importance of developing future leaders in this domain, who have not only excellent subject expertise, but also a solid values-based leadership competency. This opened the door for us to introduce 2 personal leadership courses into the 15 core courses of the programme.

As part of the total restructuring of our doctoral programme, we have not only shifted the programme focus to embrace the three pillars of our vision (entrepreneurship, sustainability, and responsibility), but we have established a programme that demonstrates very clearly the need to develop personal leadership skills in order to successfully undertake in-company action research. As a result, the use of these competencies is very obvious and is appreciated by those students who are attracted by our programme.

Results

The benefit of having bachelor students work on their personal development during a period of 3 months has had an extremely positive impact not only on their study performance and class dynamics
but has also enabled many of them to address significant personal (family) issues and has resulted in a maturing process that is palpable and much appreciated by the entire faculty.

We do not yet have results of our new Master in Finance programme, but we anticipate an even more positive outcome in terms of personal transformation and engagement of personal responsibility than in the bachelor programme. Time will tell!

We are working on the first summer school of our doctoral students which includes personal development, action research methodology and hands-on consulting skills in an integrated one-week training. We shall see how effective this week long training will be in the following in-company action research that the students will subsequently conduct.

The role of PRME/sustainability principles

• It takes courage to make such bold decisions – the Principles of PRME helped us when we faced resistance (in ourselves and our partners)
• Personal development can be successfully taught at the undergraduate level in mandatory courses and results in mind shift that goes far beyond our original intention of simply broadening minds – we now have 6 student-led “greening BSL” project teams
• Responsible leadership requires an entirely new approach towards creating effective learning environments. This is our attempt to work towards Principle 3.
• Personal development in the doctoral programme is one of several measures for us to reach Principle 4.