

Mindful Leadership Program: The Challenge, Design and Outcomes

The Challenge:

To provide managers and leaders with an intensive leadership skills development program that would serve to:

- Strengthen their view of themselves as leaders
- Have an expanded view of what it means to be a leader—and to tap into that view in order to make a difference
- Provide skill in engaging employees and serving as coaches and mentors
- Use action learning teams in order to implement strategic cross-functional/organizational change initiatives (positioning managers as engaged owners)
- Promote use of actionable tools and techniques to be used to create a solutions-oriented, collaborative work environment

This request was driven by recent scores in a Human Capital survey and a summary of 360 surveys that was provided to the organization’s leaders. The Human Capital Officer served as sponsor and described the overarching goals to include movement:

- From a non-leadership mindset to a leadership mindset
- From stovepipes to a sense of team
- From command and control to inclusiveness driven by mentors, coaches, and facilitators
- From abdication of problems to engaged owners

Design:

Take Charge addressed these challenges with a multi-pronged approach: coaching for top leaders, team development, and short intervals of senior leader and middle management development sessions (some live, some teleconferenced) over a two year period. Developmental focus included: Action Learning Teams; Executive led discussions groups (an example topic: “The Thrill of Small Acts of Courage”); and training to increase communication and leadership skills (coaching, conflict management, influence and negotiation skills).

The Mindful Leadership program is a five-phased process designed to strengthen leadership capacity at the individual, team, and organizational levels. The phases are illustrated below.



Pre-work associated with the program includes the following:

- Read several selected chapters from *Joy Rules!*
- Complete Stages II and III of the DiSC profile (a style profile that was introduced during earlier Leading and Coaching Teams sessions)
- A meeting with one's manager to discuss the program and develop personal learning goals

Building Individual and Team Capacity, the first group session, is three days in length. It focuses on these critical leadership competencies:

- Leading People/Developing Others: How to provide coaching that draws people to higher levels of leadership effectiveness.
- Leading People/Human Capital Management: How to ensure alignment, focus, and progress around shared goals.

The specific program objectives follow. The session is designed to enable participants to:

- Adopt strategies for demonstrating greater authenticity on the job
- Develop a deeper understanding of their unique DiSC style
- Apply style awareness to the coaching process
- Learn a goal setting process that aligns individual, unit, and organizational goals
- Use leadership strategies to lead high performing teams
- Use the GRPI process to initiate, or start, the work of an effective team
- Assess effectiveness of teams on an ongoing basis and improve team performance
- Use teambuilding tools to improve team processes and outcomes on the job (e.g., get higher-quality results, in less time, with less stress).
- Identify the difference they can make by building a stronger a team.
- Select, practice, and discuss the applicability of several team activities designed to strengthen team effectiveness.

Participants leave with a simple, yet powerful process, for building and leading teams (GRPI) and a comprehensive toolkit.

Tools and strategies provided include the following:

- GRPI model for team development and assessment.
- A process for goal setting and review.
- A process for modifying style.

- A process for coaching to stretch performance.
- Tips and strategies for building a results oriented work environment.
- Tools for ensuring goal clarity, role clarity, good team process and progress, and solid relationships .

Between Session Work is mandatory. It requires that participants continue their development as leaders between group sessions one and two (a three-month period). The focus on the between session work is on these critical competencies:

- ❖ Building Coalitions and Political Savvy: How to assess the political landscape and position ideas in ways that enlist support.

Specifically they are asked to:

- Conduct a teambuilding session with their team or a cross functional team.
- Meet with their manager to share learnings /insights and engage their manager in the selection of an organizational change initiative.
- Identify a broad organizational challenge to propose during the final group session of the Intentional Leadership Program. Develop a business case that outlines the challenge.
- Attend a webinar session, “Lead with Influence and Political Savvy.”
- Read selected chapters in *Joy Rules!*
- Participate in a coaching call with the instructor and Executive Sponsor.

Building Organizational Capacity, the concluding two-day classroom component of the program is focused on these critical competencies:

- ❖ Leading Change/Creativity and Innovation: How to assess organizational challenges using a wide lens in order to develop new insights and expanded thinking.
- ❖ Leading Change/Flexibility: How to maximize information flow and keep the organization engaged and aligned during times of flux and transition.
- ❖ Leading People/Conflict Management: How to maximize the potential of creative discord.

The specific learning objectives for the session include the following:

- Select a cross-functional organizational challenge to work on with several other people that will provide a measurable payback to the organization. The challenge should be broad and strategic in nature and require the brainpower of multiple divisions and offices in order to explore, plan, and implement the strategies necessary to address them.

- Explore the challenges associated power, change, and strategy implementation (through a powerful simulation) and design strategies to align and engage stakeholders up, down, across, and outside of the organization.
- Use conflict resolution strategies to ensure alignment across organizational divides.
- Use the action learning process to capture insights as you work on your Organizational Challenge.

Participants leave with a simple, yet powerful process, for tackling organizational challenges. Tools and strategies provided during this session include the following:

- The six sources of influence
- Building a business case
- Conflict style analysis including five strategies for dealing with conflict
- A five-step process for tackling organizational challenges including the associated tools

Ongoing work: For three to six months after the close of the second group session, small teams continue to work the organizational challenges they adopted. During this time, the instructor and Executive sponsor coach teams to ensure translation of the action learning approach to their projects.

Outcomes, Impacts, and Results

Participants reported significant increase in cooperation between departments, increased personal confidence, and optimism for addressing the important challenges facing the organization. Additional accomplishments included:

- Recognition and an award for having the most significant improvement on the annual trust and engagement survey (a 30+ percent increase in overall score).
- An action learning team outcome: The creation of an internally facilitated employee training function which provided core technical training to one of the organization's division's responsible for customer and industry outreach.