



{ THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN THIS
WORLD IS NOT WHERE WE ARE BUT
WHERE WE ARE GOING TO. GOETHE }

Leading Life

Developing Operational Managers for the UK Life Sector

Background

In September 2007 a highly ambitious player in the UK Life Assurance Sector took a long-term view of their talent development programme. Having grown rapidly through merger and acquisition there had been little emphasis on developing middle managers despite a strong set of corporate leadership values.

The company requested proposals for a development programme to help operational managers become more effective and better able to cope with the demands of executing company strategy. They wanted the programme to support corporate efforts to develop a strong leadership culture and to act as a 'rite of passage' for selected operational managers destined to populate the company's leadership team in the future.

Challenges

Highly skilled professionals dominate the operational leadership of a typical life assurance company. The challenges faced by this group are more complex and difficult than these relatively inexperienced managers can solve by relying on their personal technical competence and they required new skills to help them succeed through the efforts of others.

We noted that there was no homogenous leadership culture and that the requirement for leadership was changing (as it is in many dynamic businesses) towards a more inclusive, collective and networked activity demanding flexibility, collaborative relationships and interdependence.

We believed that the company's strategic goals demanded a wider distribution of effective leadership and that middle managers, particularly, needed to be better prepared to cope with uncertainty and deliver results under pressure. This hypothesis drove our programme design.

Objectives

The company requested proposals for a high impact development programme covering the fundamental leadership skills required by operational managers, supported by a range of 'elective' solutions covering specific development topics identified by needs analysis. The overall objective is to deliver operational leaders ready to:

- understand the strategic context for their actions
- quickly adapt to and champion change
- accept 'distributed' leadership responsibilities
- integrate new teams/products/processes
- cope with and lead people through organisational uncertainty

"The LDP is fundamental to our ability to attract and retain the most talented managers. It sends all the right messages that we are delivering on our promise to invest in developing our people" Corporate Business Development Director

After a competitive tender process Sykes Fairbairn was chosen to design and deliver a 12 month leadership development programme (LDP). Our highly effective, contemporary approach to leadership development is based on an accelerated learning cycle. Development is connected to the strategic context of the business and the challenges facing individual participants.

This LDP consists of a core workshop and a supporting programme of around 9 elective modules. The core programme solution is designed to develop resilient leaders who are committed to succeed. It builds on the three core leadership outputs of setting direction, creating alignment and building commitment. The core workshop acts as a foundation for the elective programme and both are reinforced by regular review sessions and participant coaching.

We deliver the core workshop using a variety of interactive techniques including music, experiential activity, video and case studies. We deliver this balanced, multi-sensory approach using highly experienced facilitators. Our core workshop design emphasizes the need to experience the pressures of leadership and provides participants an opportunity to practice and demonstrate new skills.

Content modules include: *behavioural preferences, the impact of leadership styles, motivation and effective leadership under pressure*. In each of these areas we provide simple tools to help leaders to deliver effective results whatever the circumstances and constant feedback and support from facilitators to encourage people to get the most from the learning.

The supporting programme combines mandatory and elective content covering a range of linked topics including *Developing a High Performance Culture, Communicating with Impact, Leading Projects, Mentoring and Coaching and Building High Performance Relationships*.

Candidates are selected for the LDP by the business on the basis of 180 feedback and line manager recommendation. The first core programme launched in December 2007 with five further programmes during 2008. The supporting programme will start in Q3 2008.

"Overall I felt the course was of a very high quality with first rate facilitators. The experiences from outside of the business world were valuable."

"Very professionally run. I thoroughly enjoyed the course. I thought the course and presenters were excellent."

And a final word from us:

"We are delighted to have won the tender for this prestigious and valuable programme. We are looking forward to delivering a class-leading leadership development programme that will help some excellent managers to cope with the pressure of change and deliver even better results" Mark Bouch, Director Sykes Fairbairn

For more information

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