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Client Story

Transforming Leadership at the City of Riverside

Sandy Cramer, manager of organization development and training at the City of Riverside, led an initiative to transform leadership from a directive approach to one based on partnership and trust. “We were trying to implement a substantial change initiative, but it just wasn’t working. We realized we could be more successful if we provided frontline field supervisors with skills they could use to be more effective in their roles. We wanted supervisors to be able to build trust, communicate clearly with their teams, and help coach their teams through change.” After assessing the current environment, Cramer worked with Blanchard to design a comprehensive leadership development learning journey that would be delivered over the course of a year.

Cramer rolled out the initiative with the Riverside Public Utilities department (RPU), which has approximately 600 employees who are responsible for water and electric services for the city. “The frontline supervisor training represented a cultural shift for us, so it was critical to have it include fundamental skill-building content that supported our vision for leaders in the city. We selected topics from several sources, with much of the program coming from Blanchard. We designed the learning experience to take place in person, since employees at RPU are field-based and operate without computers,” said Cramer.



Sandy Cramer

The training was held one day per month, with participants divided into cohorts to accommodate staff schedules. Classes included three levels of leaders: supervisors, superintendents, and managers. “One of our facilitators immersed himself in the field environment by riding along with workers, listening to their concerns, and building relationships,” said Cramer. “This built trust and credibility for us and helped as we customized learning activity scenarios to people’s real-life situations.”

The program, called Foreman Academy, focuses on self-awareness, leadership skills, communication, building trust, and coaching. It kicks off with a 360-degree assessment, then presents Blanchard programs Building Trust, Conversational Capacity®, Blanchard Management Essentials®, SLII®, Coaching Essentials®, Team Leadership, and Leading People Through Change®. Six group coaching sessions are held throughout the program to bridge gaps between field staff and management. And one-on-one coaching is provided for managers to help them address specific leadership challenges and apply new skills more effectively.

Measuring Results

The City of Riverside partnered with Dr. Paul Leone of MeasureUP Consulting* to determine the results of the Foreman Academy program by using post-training surveys. Early scores indicated that 82% of participants were satisfied with the learning journey, 85% were highly engaged, and 26% thought they gained new and valuable knowledge. Three months post training, 75% of participants said they had applied their new skills on the job. Additionally, 61% said they had improved key behaviors because of the training, 54% indicated they had been more effective at motivating their crew, and 42% reported improved performance and results from their crew.

Overall, 54% said they were more engaged and comfortable in their role as a leader and 63% indicated that being able to go through the Foreman Academy made them feel that the agency was investing in their professional development. Also, 29% said they were more committed to staying with the agency as a result of the career development and 42% said the program had accelerated their preparedness and readiness for a next-level leadership role. “I was pleased with the results because they indicate that we are moving in the right direction to transform leadership by giving people new skills.”

With these results, Cramer was able to expand the initiative and create the Foundations of Supervision program for all city workers. “We are starting the third cohort of the Foundations program, which has evolved

from the first rollout. It was initially designed with 12 modules but feedback from participants led us to divide the program into two levels.” Level One consists of five mandatory sessions for newly promoted employees. Content from Blanchard includes Building Trust, SLII®, and Blanchard Management Essentials®. Level Two is optional advanced training that people can take to learn more and receive a certificate. Completing Level One training is a prerequisite and the learning journey includes Coaching Essentials® and Team Leadership from Blanchard.



Key Learnings

Cramer continues to evolve the programs and shares her key learnings along the way.

“First of all, I had strong support of senior leaders at RPU and that certainly played an important role in the success of this program. Adding the coaching sessions proved to be a game changer in sustaining the leadership development and having the leaders take ownership for the cultural change. The coaching was well received by both individuals who have one-on-one sessions and participants in the group coaching sessions.

“Another learning was realizing the importance of tailoring the scenarios to the day-to-day work of the participants so they can apply the learning easier,” said Cramer. “And embedding metrics into the design of the program provides tangible proof of impact, which helps secure continued investment in leadership development for the city.”

Committing to the Future

“True leadership isn’t just about giving direction—it’s about building trust, fostering collaboration, and empowering teams to grow and succeed together,” said general manager David Garcia. “At Riverside Public Utilities, we’ve committed to cultivating leaders who inspire through partnership, communication, and authenticity. Our leadership development journey isn’t just a program; it’s a cultural shift that empowers each individual to grow, which strengthens both the individual and the team and ensures lasting impact for the city.”

Cramer understands that cultural transformation takes time, but she is committed to developing leaders at every level. “I know we are on the right path. By teaching consistent leadership skills across the city, building trust, and improving communication, we are creating a more collaborative and effective work environment for all city employees.”

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Blanchard Content

- **Building Trust:** teaches leaders how to build trust with employees and colleagues and restore trust when it has been broken.
- **Conversational Capacity®:** teaches how to engage in constructive, learning focused dialogue when challenging topics or conflicts arise so people can make informed decisions and find the best solutions.
- **Blanchard Management Essentials®** teaches the Four Core Conversations model—a highly effective framework for understanding the communication essentials needed to manage people and performance.
- **SLII®:** teaches leaders how to provide the right amount of support and direction to each team member as they navigate certain tasks. SLII® also focuses on teaching leaders how to have productive conversations that empower their direct reports to achieve goals.
- **Coaching Essentials®** teaches a coaching process model along with four coaching skills, which help leaders coach employees for increased productivity and improved relationships.
- **Team Leadership:** teaches specific skills leaders can use to improve collaboration and innovation while directing and supporting the work of teams or project groups.
- **Leading People Through Change®:** teaches how to identify and address the predictable stages employees go through during any change initiative.