WAGEWORKS

Customizing Leadership Training

"One of the first things I did at my new job at WageWorks, was meet with senior leaders to determine the top three things I needed to focus on to support the company. It was very clear that leadership training was at the top of the list," says Deanna Miller, director of learning and development. Because WageWorks (recently acquired by HealthEquity) provides administration services to manage health savings and consumer-directed benefits such as flexible spending accounts, the L&D team's main focus had been product training. However, Miller's research indicated they now needed to be deliberate about creating a focused, scalable leadership training program for all leaders in the organization.

Deanna Miller

THE PROCESS

Tactics included identifying the necessary leadership competencies and finding a customizable training program to build those skills. "I already had experience with SLII® from The Ken Blanchard Companies and knew it would help us develop our people as coaches and leaders. But I also knew we would need to tailor the design to our team," says Miller.

With a geographically dispersed workforce, virtual training options were necessary so leaders could manage their workloads. However, Miller also wanted to incorporate some face-to-face interaction to help embed the learning and build camaraderie between staff members. The company created the acronym RISE—Reach, Inspire, Serve and Empower—for its leadership training curriculum. Now in its fourth year, RISE consists of SLII®, a servant leadership session and a 360° assessment against the identified leadership competencies.

"For the SLII® training, we hold a one-hour virtual kickoff to explain both the program and the time commitment," says Miller. "Participants are invited to complete Blanchard's Launch and Learn segments within the following two weeks. Once completed, participants attend two, 2-hour virtual sessions where they continue learn the SLII® content.

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During the last session, we bring them together in person to practice the skills they've learned. It creates a way for them to practice using the skills hands-on with other leaders who are experiencing the same thing. It's an energetic day."

In the Launch portion of the SLII® program, participants receive a portfolio of assignments that explain the concepts and engage them in the content. The Learn portion incorporates activities teaching the skills and language the group needs to become an SLII® leader. Both portions are virtual assignments participants complete on their own time. Following the completion of both the Launch and Learn portions, the group meets together for the final face-to-face practice session.

"Since we were customizing the design to be a blended solution of virtual and face-to-face training, we worked with our Blanchard partners to determine the best activities for each learning environment," says Miller. "We open the live session with a flash card activity, then take learners through the practice exercises and discuss one-on-one meetings. We end with the speed matching exercise where they compete in teams to match the leadership style to the development level. It is loud and crazy, but at the same time, much learning takes place in this fun environment."

RESULTS AT WAGEWORKS

WageWorks distributes a course survey at the end of the session to measure the effectiveness of their training. The organization tracks data based on four objectives—and has seen improvement in all four areas.

Program Objectives: average of all tracks	Before Training	After Training
Define and clarify expectations of leaders at WageWorks.	2.78	3.52
Adjust and match my leadership style to the development level of others.	2.5	3.68
Identify principles and demonstrate behaviors of leading by serving the needs of others.	2.82	3.68
Apply the tools and principles to my current leadership challenges.	2.57	3.71

A year after the training, participants are reassessed using the 360° tool again to evaluate their improvements and/or conclude if additional training is needed to sustain the learning. "The next step for us is to build sustainment tools to make sure this becomes part of the company's DNA," explains Miller. "We know we are ahead of the game because people are buying into the RISE training. Others have asked to participate and existing participants asked for follow-up training. People are embracing it and want to keep it alive." The ultimate goal is to make SLII® the common leadership language at the organization.

In the inception year of the program, nine sessions were held for all director-level and above leaders. During the last three years, the program expanded to manager-level leaders and then anyone with a supervisor title. "We had great support from our leadership team when we introduced them to RISE and that enthusiasm continued, opening broader participation across the organization," said Miller. "It's critical to have buy-in and support of your executives to make a difference in your company."

POINTS OF CONSIDERATION

When considering off-the-shelf training programs, Miller says it is important to understand how the program was initially designed to be delivered. "Although I was familiar with SLII® and liked the content, I didn't think the face-to-face design would work for us. Fortunately, the Blanchard team helped us customize the delivery to fit our needs by providing both virtual and face-to-face training. We minimized time participants would've normally spent outside the office and utilized different learning modalities to deliver the content."

Because Miller supports the idea of cohorts going through training together, her company's RISE program is delivered in four weeks with 16 people. "We have a large number of remote employees, including physical sites in seven states. The opportunity for them to work within a cohort is a great relationship-building experience—especially at the end of the course when everyone gets together in person. They get to meet people they normally might never meet and as such, become trusted colleagues."

Before your organization begins a leadership training initiative, it is important have an end goal in mind. "If you want to make sure your training sticks and becomes part of the DNA of your organization, you have to make it part of the performance management system and daily activities. It needs to be front and center all the time," explains Miller. "And one last thing—make it fun! Learning new skills improving your effectiveness at work should be fun. It makes things easier and more rewarding for the trainers, the participants, and the organization."

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