



HOW TO GROW YOUR OWN LEADERS

JOHN RIDGEWAY
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ORGANIZATIONS SHARE THEIR WINNING STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING AND RETAINING TALENT

BY JOE GARDYASZ

Regardless of your industry, a universal issue for all organizations is how to attract, develop and retain the best and brightest leaders. We asked the leadership training directors at major employers in three different industries — construction, health care and financial services — to tell us about new programs they have developed in the past several years and to provide a glimpse at some of the best practices they're using to maximize their leadership and talent development.

PRINCIPAL FINANCIAL GROUP

Each year, Principal Financial Group receives about 300 applications for one of its most highly sought-after programs for aspiring leaders. Launched in 2008, Principal's Leadership Development Program typically selects just four of the most promising candidates for the highly customized cross-functional training.

Now in its ninth year, the program has about 30 graduates spread across the organization, in roles ranging from portfolio manager, investment consultant, insurance and retirement strategist, data analyst, and advertising manager, said John Ridgeway, the leadership development program manager.

"One thing that's very unique is that it's very customized to each associate," Ridgeway said. "There's not one that's had the same path. We look at what skill sets they're bringing in, which ones we can enhance. It's also a lot smaller than a lot of other rotational programs. We typically only pick four or five people a year, which allows us to provide that customization."

Participants typically complete a series of six-month rotations in four to five different locations for a program that usually takes about three years. As Principal has become an increasingly global company, the program has added opportunities for international rotations to the company's overseas offices, including Hong Kong, Chile, Mexico and Great Britain.

The ideal candidates have strong verbal and written communication skills, the business acumen to learn various products and services quickly, adaptability, as well as "a very strong balance of grace and confidence," Ridgeway said.

An advantage of the cross-functional nature of the program is that it has sprinkled graduates across different areas of the organization, he noted.

"We absolutely consider the program to be successful by how much alumni progress once they leave the program, and they are spread out across the organization," he said. Because it's still a relatively young program, none of its alumni have yet advanced into executive roles.

A universal need that the program works on with participants, many of them recent graduates, is how to transition their skills from an academic environment to a work environment.

"If you do 100 percent of what's expected of you by a professor, you get an A. If you do 100 percent of what's asked of you in a corporate environment — you've just done your job. So it's a matter of how do you give above and beyond — a little bit different than you do in school."

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BAKER GROUP

For about the past six years Baker Group has operated an internal training program called Baker Group University, which it uses to guide and track individualized training for its more than 600 employees. After developing that program, the organization's leaders recognized there was a component missing, and last year the company launched a comprehensive leadership development program to complement it.

The university concept began during the recession when business was slow, in anticipation of preparing to gear up again when the economy rebounded, said Daryld Karloff, executive vice president of building services for Baker Group.

"We realized we were investing a lot in developing our people, and that some of the classes we had developed were things that our customers were interested in also," he said. "A good example of that is we do internal safety training. We began inviting clients to that as well, in classes such as HVAC basics and our electrical systems class. And as we started doing that, we realized we needed a way to organize all those pieces. So we began to develop what we call the Baker Group University."

Among the tracks under which courses are organized are quality improvement, project management, relationship building, and finance and accounting, along with technical tracks such as cost estimating. The university approach provides Baker Group with a good way for maintaining lists of both internal trainers as well as external resources like the Center for Continuous Quality Improvement and Dale Carnegie Training.

"What we found is there were some resources out there, but we kept on reinventing the wheel finding out who the trainers were," Karloff said. The university approach also provides a good mechanism for recording who has completed training courses and what other courses they need to complete, he said.

"Our goal is to be the premier employer in our industry," Karloff said. "So when I go to talk to an employment candidate, I want to be able to talk to them in an organized fashion about

our plans for helping them as an individual. There's an old saying, 'The only thing worse about training someone and having them leave is not training someone and having them stay.' And we believe in that. And if we're developing and training people, they don't want to go anywhere; they do want to stay."

To develop its leadership training, Baker Group used a Rhode Island-based consultant, Vanessa Kiley of Kiley & Co., to customize a program based on the theme "Inwardly Sound, Outwardly Focused."

The program begins with a "360-degree review," with surveys completed by the participants' bosses, subordinates and clients for feedback. Participants then attend two days of training every six to eight weeks, plus the Dale Carnegie class and reading/homework assignments.

"That whole concept has a lot of science behind it," Karloff said. "You're never going to be a great leader until you understand what your strengths and your blind spots are."

For the initial class, "we spent a lot of time figuring out who that right 16 people would be," he said. "We looked at who exudes the cultural values that are really important to us, and how do we take people who understand those cultural values and turn them into future leaders."

Sixteen people graduated from the initial class in September, and the second class began in mid-December.

"We've had overwhelmingly positive response from people going through the class as well as clients (who have noticed the difference in the participants)," Karloff said. "And they're such a great influence on their co-workers who haven't gone through the class."



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DARYLD KARLOFF
Baker Group



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// (W)E'RE HAVING TO GO OUT AND FIND INDIVIDUALS, WHEREAS EVEN TWO YEARS AGO WE HAD PLENTY OF APPLICANTS FOR OUR POSITIONS. //

JOYCE McDANEL

UnityPoint Health-Des Moines

UNITYPOINT HEALTH-DES MOINES

When UnityPoint Health-Des Moines was initially forming its current leadership and talent development programs in 2010, the health care organization was promoting from within for about 35 to 40 percent of its leadership openings, while looking outside the organization to fill the majority of such leadership openings.

A measure of the success of those programs: That ratio has since been reversed and UnityPoint Health-Des Moines now recruits the majority of its leaders from within, said Joyce McDanel, vice president of human resources and education.

UnityPoint Health-Des Moines, which is part of the larger UnityPoint Health network, employs about 7,800 health care professionals. It operates Iowa Methodist Medical Center, Blank Children's Hospital, Iowa Lutheran Hospital and Methodist West Hospital. It includes more than 290 physicians and providers working in more than 50 UnityPoint Clinic locations, along with home health care services through UnityPoint at Home.

In 2015, the last complete data available, the organization promoted more than 90 percent of its supervisors from within, and among its management openings, more than 70 percent were promoted from within. "So we know that the programs are working," McDanel said.

To provide a solid foundation for those leaders who have been promoted, in 2012 UnityPoint Health developed New Leader U, which provides a program for newly promoted leaders for their crucial initial months in their new position.

The curriculum consists of a series of half-day and full-day courses held over the course of three to six months. "So we make sure they have access to the tools and resources they need to be successful in their leadership role," she said. "One of the unique things about that program is at least 50 percent of it is interaction- and activity-based, and applying what they're learning during the courses."

UnityPoint Health has also developed other leadership programs over the past several years to address specific training needs for various groups. For instance, it partnered with Central Iowa Works, a program of United Way of Central Iowa, in 2010 to develop the Break Through to Leadership program to provide employees with leadership potential the opportunity to move into management roles. UnityPoint Health contracted with Dale Carnegie Training to deliver that curriculum.

"That has been a very successful program," McDanel said. Between 40 and 50 percent of participants in the program have been promoted to higher level positions since completing the program. At the same time, others who have taken the program may decide that a leadership position isn't right for them, she added.

UnityPoint uses project-based exposure to provide opportunities for new leaders, including workers who are part of Breakthrough to Leadership, to practice their skills.

For instance, UnityPoint holds quarterly leadership development seminars that focus on strengthening one of the leadership competencies that senior leaders have identified for the organization. "Graduates from the Breakthrough to Leadership program have helped coordinate these quarterly seminars, and then they were invited to attend as well," McDanel said. "So that gave them exposure and gave them an opportunity to own a project of their own."

Adopting a strategy of "growing your own leadership" has resulted in multiple benefits that have strengthened UnityPoint Health, she noted.

"What we do believe in, and we hope that our employees also believe, is that because we are committed to providing opportunities, we hope that helps with retention overall," she said. "For some individuals, they want to know what their career path looks like before they even accept a position. And we need to be prepared to answer those questions, because those are very common questions now. We are in an environment that is really one where we're having to go out and find individuals, whereas even two years ago we had plenty of applicants for our positions."

"When your organization has a reputation for leadership development, that makes it easier to open that dialogue with those individuals about potential opportunities." ■

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM EACH COMPANY:

Principal purposely kept its leadership development group very small so that it could make the program highly customized.

UnityPoint Health-Des Moines pulls leaders from across the organization to facilitate its leadership classes, and makes a point of including participants from its Breakthrough to Leadership program to both coordinate and then attend quarterly sessions held for higher-level leaders.

Baker Group has found value in organizing its training resources and individual development records through a "university" approach with tracks ranging from management to technical issues, and invites its clients to attend many of the sessions as well.



JOE GARDYASZ

Business Record HR & Education beat reporter

HAVE AN IDEA OR TIP?

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