

CENTER FOR CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

I M P A C T S T U D Y



GROWING FUTURE LEADERS THROUGH AN INNOVATIVE COACHING PROCESS



Center for
Creative
Leadership

EUROPE NORTH AMERICA ASIA

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The Challenge

Sonoco, a global provider of packaging solutions, has long attributed its success to the people who have worked for the company over its 106-year history and helped turn it into a \$3.2 billion business with more than 300 operations in 35 countries. A symbol of Sonoco's people-oriented tradition of respect and appreciation is a bronze statue titled "People Build Businesses" that stands at the entrance to its corporate headquarters in Hartsville, South Carolina, USA. With a strong belief that long-term investment in people is important to sustain the company's historical success, Sonoco's challenge was how best to develop future leaders from within.



The Solution

Sonoco and the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL)[®] worked together to create multiple leadership development initiatives in 2000 that targeted high-potential managers across its business units and corporate staff groups. One of these initiatives was the Coaching for Development (CFD) programme. To assess the impact of this innovative and ambitious programme, we followed up with a formal evaluation.

Sonoco's primary objective for CFD was to improve the leadership skills of mid-level and senior managers. A secondary goal was to develop and improve the coaching skills of HR managers. In addition, Sonoco wanted to place more emphasis on coaching and developing, one of its core competencies.

Sonoco chose CCL as its partner for several reasons, notably the Center's flexibility in customising a programme to meet Sonoco's needs internationally. Sonoco had sent executives through open-enrolment programmes at CCL in the past and viewed the Center as experts and leaders in the field.

A WORKING PARTNERSHIP

From the beginning, the design and evaluation of the initiative were made easier because the partners held the same assumptions about how leaders are developed. Sonoco felt that HR could take a more proactive role to improve the leadership skills of managers, and that ultimately this would have a positive impact on business since effective leaders result in effective operations. The team at Sonoco recognised that new capabilities take time to develop and that many cohorts of HR managers would need to learn and practice fundamental concepts related to coaching in order to make a difference. They were willing to devote both time and resources to achieve their outcomes.

The Sonoco team initially included HR managers who were closely tied into the business units. This group functioned as a steering committee and actively worked with CCL to design the initiative and develop coaching scenarios that were later embedded in the curriculum. Open-ended, but focused, conversations between CCL faculty member Sharon Ting and the Sonoco team resulted in a careful interweaving of classroom and coaching sessions, individual consultations between participants and CCL facilitators, and Booster Day programmes for ongoing learning and reinforcement.

The agenda they created called for:

- » Three days of classroom work (didactic, dialogue, videotaping)
- » Three follow-on coaching sessions
- » Two days of classroom work six months later
- » Two follow-on coaching sessions
- » Ongoing Booster Day programmes once a year
- » Quarterly conference calls with CCL coaches

SOME FINE-TUNING

The coaching programme has evolved over the years as additional cohorts have gone through it. HR managers from the industrial sector were the first to participate, followed by HR managers in the consumer sector. Shortly thereafter, a group of Sonoco executives participated in an abbreviated version of the programme. Most recently, two cohorts of HR managers outside the United States were trained as coaches.

To reinforce coaching as a core competency for HR, Sonoco implemented other changes. For example, the HR managers' performance management plans now include coaching as a key business

OBJECTIVES

- » Increase the leadership capabilities of mid-level managers
- » Build coaching capacity within the company
- » Equip HR managers with tools and skills needed to provide coaching as an in-house resource
- » Create a coaching culture
- » Continue to emphasise the proactive role of HR

OUTCOMES

- » More than two years after completing the programme, those involved perceived the programme as having a positive effect
- » Managers developed more effective working relationships with others
- » Managers learned how to identify challenges and developmental opportunities that would improve their future performance as leaders
- » Coaches learned foundational competencies such as establishing productive coaching relationships and analysing assessment data
- » Coaches became motivated to learn additional coaching techniques
- » Coaching sessions enabled coaches and managers to address issues such as effectively working with subordinates, peers, bosses and upper management, and increasing their career and personal development options
- » Potential benefits to the organisation included improved job performance and the ability to give and receive candid feedback.

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objective. The programme is run on an as-needed basis, and about 10 to 12 managers participate at a time.

Outcomes

After the first two programme runs, an evaluation of the coaching programme was undertaken involving nearly two dozen individuals who had completed their formal training. The objective was to assess the results of the programme and determine what improvements might be needed. The evaluation included a brief online survey, followed by a 30-minute telephone interview.

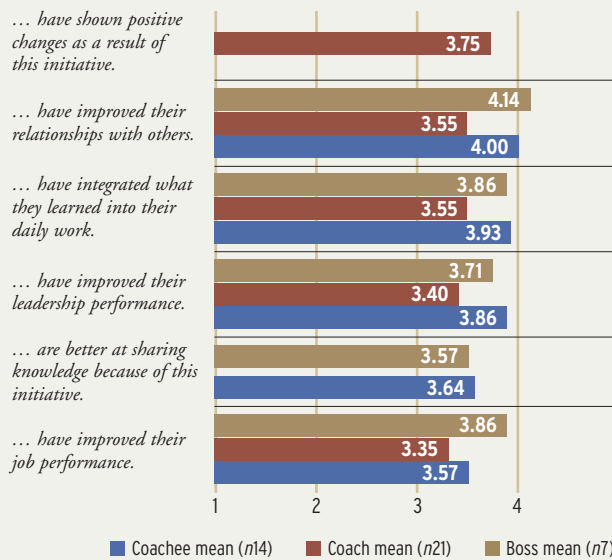
The surveys were administered to HR managers, managers they coached, and the bosses of the people who were coached. Twenty-one of the 22 HR participating managers, 14 managers they coached, and eight bosses of the coached managers participated in the survey. These data were then brought to life by comments offered during the phone interviews. A random sample of HR managers, at least one individual coached

FIGURE 1: TOP THREE COACHING SKILLS DEMONSTRATED BY SONOCO HR COACHES

COACHING SKILLS	% COACHEE MENTIONS	COMMENT
Establishing a coaching relationship	43%	<i>"She established confidentiality, and I completely felt like I could trust her. Whatever we say stays in this room. Then you can be honest about what you are experiencing with your boss or direct report."</i>
Setting goals and creating development plans	36%	<i>"We came up with ideas together and we're planning some follow-up sessions."</i>
Identifying challenges and development opportunities	29%	<i>"She came up with questions that helped me think what else I could be doing, how to look at the situation differently."</i>

FIGURE 2: IMPACT ON MANAGER BEING COACHED

The managers being coached ...



by them, and the individual's boss were invited to participate in the calls. Fifteen HR managers and eight people they coached participated.

Several significant outcomes were achieved. These outcomes show:

1. The top three coaching skills demonstrated by the coaches, as perceived by the coachees (See Fig. 1.)
2. The impact on managers coached in five competency areas, as reported by the coachees, their coaches and their bosses (See Fig. 2.)

An integration of these findings underscores that, from the point of view of the coach, the central topic of the coaching sessions was learning how to develop effective working relationships with others. From the perspective of the manager being coached, however, what was most appreciated about these sessions was the ability of the coach to establish a supportive relationship and assist the manager with goal-setting, developmental planning and identifying future challenges and opportunities. Overall, when bosses, coaches and coachees rated

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A CCL-TRAINED COACH GOES TO WORK

A few years back, Sonoco hired a woman as plant manager and tasked her with leading some major changes at the facility, particularly around its safety record and ability to embrace change. Besides being new to Sonoco, the plant manager was also the first female in a senior management position at this particular location.

Initial feedback from plant employees indicated that this new plant manager might face significant resistance from her management team as well as the workforce as a whole. To help her succeed, Sonoco paired her with an internal CCL-trained coach.

The coach said his crucial first step in assuring the success of the process was to instill in the plant manager a sense of commitment. "A coach needs to be able to sell an ambivalent coachee on the benefits of development," the coach said. "The reputation and stature of CCL give a lot of credibility to what we do, and the effect is that people are more open to try the process."

The coach and the plant manager held frequent meetings,

"The reputation and stature of CCL gives a lot of credibility to what we do, and the effect is that people are more open to try the process."

especially during that first year. He provided her with anecdotal feedback from conversations and observations on the plant floor. In this way, she learned what was needed to communicate effectively with employees and to begin to initiate change and gain acceptance. The coach also provided a support system while she built up networks with others in the company.

The manager had a number of frustrating periods that first year, and without a highly skilled coach she indicated that she might not have stayed with the company. With her coach's support, she was able to focus on the impact she was making and to continue making progress. He kept reminding her that success with just one individual was good progress. Eventually she won the respect of the employees and transformed the existing culture of individuals into a culture of team players. Working together, they completely turned around the plant's safety record in addition to other key performances. A complete culture change was achieved as a result of the teamwork/employee empowerment that developed from the coaching process.

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the changes observed in managers, “improved relationships with others” was the positive change most frequently mentioned by all three groups.

Evaluations help fine-tune innovative interventions. Not surprisingly, one insight was that programme impact could be enhanced through greater involvement of the bosses of managers being coached. A second insight was that clear statements — about the level of coaching competence HR managers were expected to achieve — would be helpful. The third insight related to the importance of communicating and refining the criteria used to select those who were coached. The absence of such information can confuse those being coached about whether there is a subtle message being sent to him or her by a boss. Finally, developmental progress is often reinforced when programme coaches meet at a follow-up meeting or learning event to discuss how they are applying what they learned and receive ideas and support from others.

Many success stories have been reported anecdotally, including that of a new female plant manager whose coach provided a support system while she got her feet on the

ground and helped her focus on the impact she was making. (See “A CCL-Trained Coach Goes to Work.”)

Conclusions

CCL’s customised Coaching for Development programme has been in place for more than five years as part of Sonoco’s comprehensive leadership development process. The programme has been judged very successful in its foundational work of embedding a coaching culture in the organisation, with HR coaches practicing new skills and techniques to support the development of high-potential managers internationally.

Sonoco’s high-level of commitment to leadership development was recognised in 2005 when the company was named to the list of the Top 20 U.S. Companies for Leaders, a study sponsored by Hewitt Associates and The Human Resource Planning Society.

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If building organisational leadership capacity is a concern for you, the Center can offer creative and customised solutions for addressing your leadership needs. Whether your goal is to improve the effectiveness of the executive team, to systematically develop your high-potential managers, expand your organisation’s ability to work globally or to create a shared leadership culture at all levels of the organisation, we can help.

Through our global custom solutions team we can create approaches ranging from one-time programmes designed to jump start leader development to ongoing learning initiatives geared to maximise learning and drive change.

In developing a custom leadership initiative, we work closely with you, contributing our expertise and experience toward the design of a programme that will address your unique organisational and individual leadership development needs. By asking the right questions, learning about your situation, industry, challenges, culture, goals and people, and following up on results by providing impact analysis, we can ensure that what we provide meets your objectives.

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