

Best Practices Sharon Youngblood

Biz Facts: State Farm Insurance

- ◆ Corporate offices are located in Bloomington, Illinois
- ◆ George J. Mecherle founded State Farm in 1922
- ◆ Founding Principle: Insurance coverage at a fair price with fair claim settlements
- ◆ 80,000 employees working in 13 zones across the country
- ◆ Shayne Bedeker is an Analyst, Learning & Development

Get Me In The Game Coach...

"I Both sports and business professionals use the term coach. Both seek excellence and desire to succeed on the playing field or in the boardroom. However, if you hire a well trained business coach, do not expect to see a Bobby Knight, the famous opinionated basketball coach, show up. Leadership development models uses the terminology "coach" to describe those who assist corporate people develop into world-class leaders but the sports and business similarities rapidly diverge.

A major distinction between the sports model, where the coach usually is expert in the game he/she is coaching, and the business model is that the coach need not be expert in the leaders' industry. Although business grounding is essential, he or she needs to be expert in the philosophy and process of coaching. The coach approach is one of focusing the issues the leader faces, helping the leader see their current position, determine where the leader wants to go, supporting them to figure out how to solve their challenges, plan and implement. It is a two-way empowering conversation between the coach and the leader rather than an expert telling the leader how to proceed. 75% of my clients are using coaching, with demonstrated success, as a best practice to develop their leaders - up 65% from five years ago.

How does a behemoth company like State Farm Insurance incorporate an innovative leadership development program such as coaching? We asked Shayne Bedeker, Analyst Leadership Development, State Farm Insurance. Bedeker works with Leadership Development professionals throughout the 13 company zones, which add up to the State Farm enterprise. These professionals are responsible for the development of employees, including 8000 identified leaders.

She said, "State Farm began looking at many initiatives, including coaching, to develop a leadership model in 2002. After identifying an outside corporate coaching training source, we started training our L&D folks to use coaching skills & licensed them to be able to facilitate The Coaching Clinic, which provide leaders with an instructor-led session where they can learn & practice coaching skills." Bedeker said that since 2002, the coaching process touched 1000 of their 8000 leaders. "Everybody throughout the enterprise is on a different schedule and implementation plan tailored to their particular zone. Our goal is to provide leadership with coaching skills such as problem solving, innovation and dialogue techniques."

According to Bedeker, the program is in its infancy and while the company will soon train 22 more Leadership Development professionals, not everyone across the enterprise is familiar with the coach approach. The company plans to gather data and coaching still needs to gain enterprise wide buy in. Although much of her evaluation is at this point anecdotal, Bedeker and others are encouraged with positive feedback received from leaders. "You think this approach is going to take more time, yet I found it saves me so much time. We are able to do more with a lot less," reports a second level manager.

"During a reduction of staff phase when you expect morale to be at its lowest, leaders using the coach approach to working with their people observed people were still productive and positive - the opposite of what you'd expect," said another leader. Contributions Bedeker and others are seeing from the use of coaching include improvements in conversations, relationships, time savings, and the productive use of the coach approach in performance reviews.

In 1922, State Farm formed with the innovative idea that farmers should pay less insurance premiums because they did not drive as much or as far as their city counterparts. Over eighty years later State Farm remains an industry leader pioneering, along with other forward looking organizations, an innovative promising approach to developing leaders - the coach leadership development approach.

Sharon Youngblood is a Certified Management Consultant, coach and speaker. She may be contacted at say@youngbloodconsulting.com or (520) 795-7498. Additional articles are available: www.youngbloodconsulting.com