Leadership and Management with Inscape Publishing Products

- *DiSC® Classic*
- *Work Expectations Profile*
- *Team Dimensions Profile*
- *Time Mastery Profile®*
- *Coping & Stress Profile®*
- *DiSC PPSS*
- *DiSC Management Action Planner*

Developing new managers into great leaders is a top priority for every large company. Few things are as vital as having novice executives learn to apply key skills and functions consistently throughout an organization.

However, the process won't work if the mentors, the long-term managers, never learned those crucial skills in the first place. Rogene Baxter, founder and president of the Bridgewater Group, recently witnessed such a breakdown when she designed and implemented a training program for a global transportation company.

The organization wanted a leadership and management program that could be used in both its domestic and international locations. Baxter understood that the program would be geared toward new managers, but her needs analysis uncovered problems that would not just go away with a fresh crop of leaders.

"The managers they already had did not have the necessary skills," Baxter says. "Basically, the company had promoted star people into managerial roles, but they didn't develop them to let them know how different their jobs would be. And the new managers didn't have a clue how to proceed."

Baxter's needs assessment revealed the consequences of the company's error. Turnover was high, particularly among employees with leadership potential. Also, the inability to bring out the best in people or to implement innovation stifled the organization. Lastly, poor planning and ineffective management styles were rampant.

The underlying reasons for the problems included such usual suspects as unclear goals and different behavioral styles among the staff. However, another root cause was that employees felt a lack of opportunity. This was especially true with the best workers, who did not appreciate what passed for advancement in the organization. The opportunities to broaden their horizons were simply not there.

"That's one of the perks that this new generation requires," Baxter says. "They say, 'Either help me develop new skills or I am out of here!' "

Further complicating the situation, the managers did not know the impact of their own behavior and had made little attempt to understand their peers. Baxter knew that she had to develop a program that resolved these issues while nurturing managers into leadership roles.

"We also needed to convince the company of the importance of developing their people," Baxter says. "And we needed their managers in the organization to coach and support the initiative."

With such ambitious intentions, Baxter was not going to leave anything to chance. Interviewing senior leadership in the organization to create buy-in and full support, she then created a pilot program. Company leaders were asked to identify people who would be good trial participants. Also, because multiple trainers at different locations would handle any successful program in the future, Baxter invited potential internal trainers to the sessions.

Case Study

After going through the pilot program, Baxter asked the participants to offer their feedback. Based on these results and on her experience with the design, Baxter added, deleted, or revised sections of the program as needed. Then she tested the system on a new group, this time in Asia.

"I always think I have it right by the pilot stage," Baxter says. "But I never do. There are always adjustments that need to be made."

Although the program was designed for new managers, Baxter found that long-term managers enrolled themselves into the pilot group and thrived in the program. Fortunately, the company's leaders needed little convincing to subsequently advertise the sessions as open to veterans and new mangers alike.

As it turned out, about two-thirds of the initial participants were long-term managers, including the director of a division. Baxter says the high number of experienced leaders in the program reflected the thirst for managerial and leadership guidance.

"The company had said, 'We're going to develop new managers,' but they hadn't taken the effort to develop their long-term managers first," Baxter says. "Some participants were encouraged to attend the training, but no one was forced to. The people there just wanted to learn."

What the participants learned in the first module was the power of self-knowledge. Baxter administered *DiSC® Classic* to the participants and introduced them to the DiSC model. She made it clear that the profile's insights about style, behavior, and motivation would be the basis of the program.

"I told them that DiSC would be integrated into all subsequent sessions," Baxter says. "This was because I wanted to make sure that they knew themselves very well before they started to lead other people."

With the DiSC model fresh in their minds, the participants began the second module by responding to the *Work Expectations Profile*. Baxter used the profile's results to lead the participants in a conversation about effective manager-employee communication, which helped them think about what would be expected of them in their roles.

The module continued by focusing on the hiring process. For this concept, Baxter administered the Role Behavior Analysis to the managers. Baxter tied in the instrument's results with a larger discussion about understanding the expected behaviors for a given role, and how that related to hiring the right people for the right job.

For the section on effective teamwork, Baxter brought out the *Team Dimensions Profile*. The participants learned about the Z-Process and the theory of team balance. Baxter used the profile's insights to get the managers focused on creating a positive environment and using their employees' individual strengths to their fullest.

"We took a break from the formal modules at that point," Baxter says. "We wanted the participants to take responsibility for their own learning."

On their own, the managers responded to the *Time Mastery Profile®* and the *Coping & Stress Profile®*. These self-directed assessments helped the participants learn concrete skills while keeping them from growing overly dependent on Baxter for their insights.

Module three didn't include any new instruments. Instead, Baxter continued to emphasize the relevance of the DiSC model to effective communication. The participants discussed the skills they had learned so far, and they tied in the results of the various profiles to conflict management, delegation ability, and proper managerial techniques.

For the final module, Baxter administered *DiSC PPSS* and the *DiSC Management Action Planner*. These tools were useful for conversations about vital skills such as coaching and managing performance. Baxter also revisited the *Role Behavior Analysis*, showing how it could be effective for improving manager-employee relationships.

"When they left module four, we wanted them to be committed to their own development," Baxter says. "With time, their skills will turn into habits."

Perhaps the most important skill that the participants learned was the simple power of improved communication. The participants gained a better understanding of themselves, their fellow managers, and their subordinates. This helped them relate to one another more effectively and keep misunderstandings to a minimum.

"They are talking with each other more now," Baxter says. "They are even talking to people they would not have approached before."

Better communication, in turn, allowed the participants to express their opinions and feelings, which led to decreased stress. But the real surge in participant enthusiasm came from their knowledge that action was being taken to resolve their problems and develop their skills.

"The training gives them a great deal of encouragement," Baxter says. "That is extremely important. To tell you the truth, it may be the most important thing."

The new managers increased their confidence in their leadership abilities, while the long-term managers identified the errors that had held them back. In addition, the team process became less intimidating to the managers, who learned that occasional difficulties are no reason to abandon the Z-Process.

"We helped them see that if something isn't as smooth as it should be, it doesn't mean that that they've blown it," Baxter says. "The odds are that things are moving right along, the way they're supposed to. And they now tap into some ideas to make it better."

As a result of the revitalized work environment, the organization saw increased productivity, lower turnover rates, and better morale. Also, the managers improved their delegation, problem-solving, and decision-making skills.

Another benefit was that the quality of the company's new employees soared. Baxter says this is because the participants who are doing the hiring now understand their own needs.

"They have a better idea of the people they are looking for," Baxter says. "The right candidates are being hired, and retention has improved."

More than 500 participants have gone thorough the program, and many have been promoted. Baxter says that the productive, motivational environment that once was out of reach is now established.

"The company now develops its people," Baxter says. "And the participants learned the difference between a 'manager' and a 'leader.' "