

Case Studies

Name:

Keith Ayers

Title:

A Real Commitment to Authentic Improvement

The Results:

“Only a process of development with application and reinforcement can achieve lasting change,” says Keith Ayers, president of Integro Learning Company. “One-time event training is not an option.”

Such bold declarations are not unusual for Ayers. His years of experience have convinced him that behavioral change is possibly only when appropriate time and effort are involved. This belief led to the creation of his *Leadership Development Process*, which uses multiple instruments to teach long-lasting skills to participants.

So when a pharmaceutical company asked him to create a training program for its managers, Ayers realized that a full process was necessary and that a few quick sessions would have a negligible effect. Ayers wanted to hone the managers’ communication skills, but he also wanted to address larger issues that commonly afflict working environments.

“The importance of building trust is often overlooked,” Ayers says. “Many leaders think of themselves as trustworthy, but they have not established trust with their employees.”

Ayers says that trust goes beyond ethical and legal behavior, although those are important components. In Ayers’ view, trust involves creating a culture where employees believe that their supervisors are looking out for them. Such an atmosphere allows employees to be accountable, take ownership of their duties, and perform their best work.

Trust was indeed a problem at the pharmaceutical company. Ayers could see that the staff did not have enough faith in one another to execute solid plans, let alone implement innovation. And while the rate of overall turnover was decent, the company had trouble holding on to its most talented people.

“They also had lots of arguments among themselves,” Ayers says. “One manager, in particular, had frequent temper tantrums.”

Although Ayers believed that the lack of trust was a primary cause of the organization’s issues, he thought that fear of conflict and an autocratic management structure were also factors. In addition, Ayers saw that the managers did not understand their own behavior patterns or those of their peers.

“They made no effort to understand each other,” Ayers says. “Culture clashes were legendary, especially between the salesmen and scientists.”

Developing communication and leadership skills in such an atmosphere was a difficult task. However, Ayers was determined to help the managers improve in multiple areas, establish a culture of trust, and create real change. He knew such goals required an intricate process of skill building, with time built in to give participants time to learn and use their new habits. So he sold the company on the *Leadership Development Process*, which includes five distinct modules over 12 to 18 months of training.



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“The managers attend the training, then they apply the learning with employees after each module,” Ayers says. “It’s a full system, not a standalone event.”

DiSC® Classic and the *Work Expectations Profile* were vital parts of Module One. Ayers administered the profiles to the managers and discussed the results, with an emphasis on the importance of knowing one’s own behavior pattern and motivations. The participants were eager to learn how the DiSC model could help them resolve people problems, and they garnered tips on how to facilitate change.

“We also talked about identifying and satisfying employee needs,” Ayers says. “The module was the first step toward building trust.”

Of course, the next step was to introduce the distributive-learning process. The managers knew that they would have to be good teachers for the employees to gain the same insights that they were getting. After guiding their workers through the profiles and discussing the results, the managers saw that their employees were just as eager to improve their work environment as the leaders were. The enthusiasm for distributive learning lasted throughout the program.

In Module Two, the participants responded to the *Personal Listening Profile®*. The fact that different listening approaches could be the cause of miscommunication was news to the managers, who saw fresh proof of the importance of perception. Ayers then used the profile’s insights to lead a discussion about mentoring skills, and the participants learned the basics of coaching and counseling their employees.

By the time the managers attended Module Three, they had applied some of their new skills in their working lives. So Ayers reinforced the lessons of the first modules before administering the *Discovering Diversity Profile®*. He then used the profile to show how developing understanding and acceptance was not only beneficial to employees, but essential to a positive work environment.

“Then we had a break between the modules,” Ayers says. “We used it for an optional day on the *Time Mastery Profile®*.”

Optional as it was, the session on the *Time Mastery Profile®* was a hit with the participants. By learning how to prioritize better and minimize interruptions, the managers added to their rapidly expanding base of skills. Ayers says the leaders were beginning to understand that to be effective they had to manage the environment, not their people.

Module Four strengthened the lessons of the training so far, while adding fresh skills such as effective teamwork. For this crucial concept, Ayers introduced the participants to the *Team Dimensions Profile*. The managers saw how using the Z-Process could smooth interpersonal conflicts and foster innovation. They also discovered more about the importance of roles and preferences.

“Again, we made the point that behavioral style or role is no excuse for poor performance,” Ayers says. “We made it clear that you can’t just say, ‘That’s the way I am.’ Communication skills can always be improved.”

Another key element of Module Four was the *Coping & Stress Profile®*. Ayers believed the instrument would help the managers learn how to handle their jobs even when under stress.



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Because such grace under pressure is an essential function of leadership, the lessons proved to be an excellent segue to the final module.

The goal of Module Five was for the managers to maximize their leadership abilities while synthesizing all the skills they had learned to that point. The *Dimensions of Leadership Profile* was a significant component of the training. Ayers went over the profile with the managers, making it clear that a shared-leadership environment was the optimal scenario. He also took the opportunity to reinforce the lessons of the previous sessions, paying special attention to the DiSC model.

“By the last module, the managers were much more aware of their own behavior styles, roles, and motivations,” Ayers says. “They knew their own strengths and weaknesses.”

The participants also had enhanced their communication and leadership skills, which helped them develop effective strategies for their positions. In addition, the managers learned that styles and preferences are not superior or inferior to one another, and that different styles often require different approaches.

Such insights helped ease conflict in the workplace, most strikingly with the manager who previously would blow up at the slightest provocation. The supervisor learned not to take everything so personally, and he adjusted his behavior rather than become frustrated with his colleagues.

“He doesn’t explode in rage anymore,” Ayers says. “He understands now why miscommunication happens and how to resolve it.”

Many other individuals improved their communication skills as well, and even the interaction within departments went more smoothly. As a result, well-qualified workers stopped fleeing the company, and many participants were promoted into senior positions. The final proof was that the organization saw higher scores on a 50-point competencies scale. Ayers says the managers are better leaders and the employees have a greater sense of engagement, commitment, and purpose.

“Purpose-driven work provides more motivation than external rewards do,” Ayers. “And developing a culture of trust means that people are free to do their best work.”