

# Case Study

People First Productivity Solutions

GROW Coaching for Emerging Leaders in a Global Produce Company



## THE CHALLENGE

Work with 22 emerging leaders on leadership competencies to strengthen the company at a time of global growth.

## CUSTOM SOLUTION

Supplement training in a year-long immersion leadership program with individual coaching and with small group coaching in a webinar format. Understand and address the unique development needs of each participant so they exit the program with greater self-awareness, stronger leadership capacity, and an ability to contribute cross-functionally.

## RESULT

Participants formed strong bonds with each other and with their teams. They understood leadership and their own challenges in stepping into the roles of leaders. Three years later, all 22 participants have taken on higher levels of responsibility, inside and outside of their company. They remain engaged in alumni activities, seeking opportunities for additional coaching as needed and attending webinar coaching sessions for ongoing development.

## Learning What It Means To Be a Leader.

Classroom training is a start. But learning academic theory isn't enough when true behavior change and increased leadership capacity is the desired outcome. In year 4 of a successful year-long leadership program, this global organization decided to add a robust coaching component designed to stretch each participant. Coaching was offered for development and took two forms throughout that year. First, each participant received 1-on-1 coaching sessions with Deb Calvert, president and founder of People First Productivity Solutions. Second, small group coaching workshops were offered in a webinar format. New tools were introduced, including the Leadership Practices Inventory®, a 360-assessment tool, to gather feedback so each participant could focus their development. Participants set development goals, consulting with their managers and their coach to pinpoint the area(s) of greatest need. For all of them, the primary focus was to learn more about what it would take for them, personally, to be more effective as a leader. Next, they worked on small group assignments and a Capstone Project to put in practice what they had learned in the classroom and in their coaching.



# In participants' own words

At graduation from this program, here's what participants had to say:

"The assessments and discussions over the past year have helped me learn more about my own personality, how I approach problems, and how I can adjust to do things to increase my leadership effectiveness on a day-to-day basis."

"I am able to handle adversity in the workplace with a bit more perspective and patience.... I guess the next step is to be the model for the changes that I want to see. I now appreciate my responsibility within the company as a leader. Whether I ever wanted it or not, people look to me for affirmation, support, criticism, gratitude, encouragement, etc."

"Before, I tended to be a boss and would accomplish my job by giving orders or assigning tasks. Now I want to influence others to accomplish common objectives, and I care more about how others perceive me as a supervisor and as a person."

"I have become more proactive and feel better informed to make sound decisions. As a leader, I now act with more courage and think more innovatively."

"I got to know myself better as a leader, have clearer goals, and know what my opportunities and strengths are."

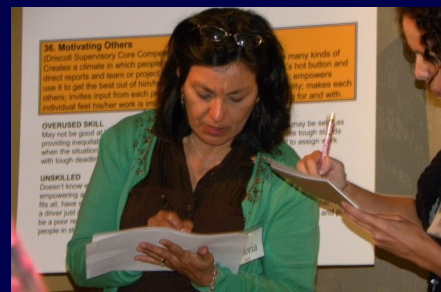
"I am now more inclined to share my ideas and vision of the future with my team. I now make it a point to listen and support those voices that are not always as loud as the others."

"I have learned to be more patient and understanding of others' ideas and making sure my actions and beliefs are in line with the core values of the company."

"I really feel I have changed my leadership style to one that is more direct and that works better for my organization."

"I am constantly looking at ways to increase my leadership effectiveness. I know my weaknesses, and I'm able to see when I'm falling into the same routine and stop myself and reroute the communication. My confidence has increased."

"I have discovered ways that growing individually also helps me develop leadership skills to develop other people."



## The Coaching Plan for Program Participants

With 22 participants to coach for a year and budgetary considerations in mind, we constructed a 4-pronged coaching plan.

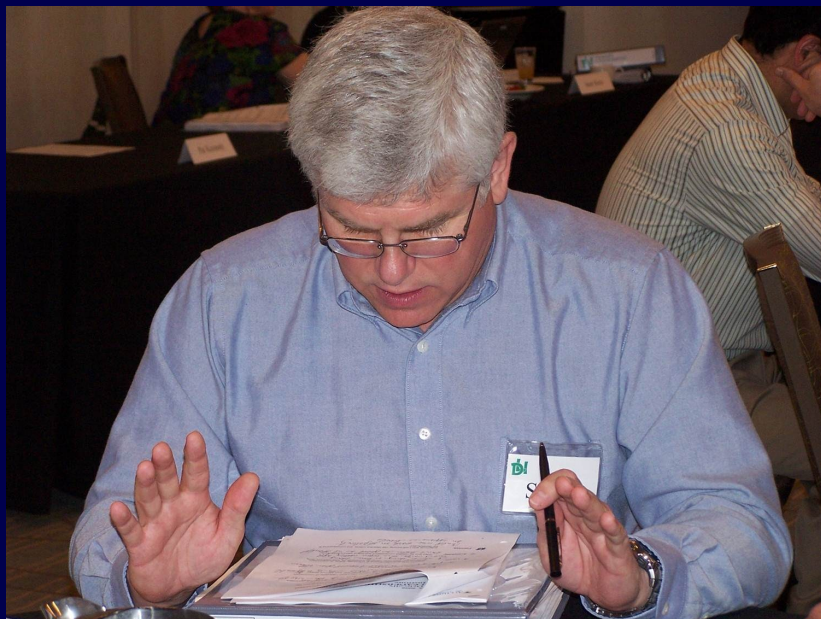
First, each participant worked with their manager to write their own Development Plan. Leadership competencies selected by the senior executive team were provided as the basis for all plans.

Second, each participant spent an hour in a 1-on-1 coaching call with Deb Calvert of People First Productivity Solutions. Deb probed to understand how they would achieve their goals, and participants made firmer commitments to action items needed to accomplish these goals.

Throughout the year, the 1-on-1 coaching continued in formal and informal check-in calls and meetings. Participants had an open invitation to consult with Deb for coaching when they got stuck in their group work or independent development.

Third, a series of small group webinars were conducted by Deb. Each focused on a specific leadership behavior, and participants attended the ones where they wanted additional support. The webinars were formatted to provide group coaching rather than generic instruction.

Finally, small group assignments between sessions were constructed so participants would coach one another. Relevant challenges were built into each assignment to stretch participants in their development and in their cohort coaching.





## Continued Growth & Development

The proof that coaching really works is in the ongoing growth and development of this impressive group. Three years after their program participation and coaching, they have all thrived in their careers and been recognized as true leaders.

Of the 22, two have relocated to be closer to their families and left the company. Both are in jobs where they continue to use what they learned and are happy in their new places.

All 20 of those who have stayed with the company have taken on additional responsibilities and/or stepped into more senior-level roles.

Several have continued to seek learning and growth opportunities, completing the work they started in their program plans for development. This includes learning a second language, completing a college degree program, participating in industry-wide leadership programs, taking courses in executive development, and enrolling in additional training offered inside the company.

Several participants have repeated the 360-degree assessment on leadership behaviors, measuring their progress against the first assessment taken during their program.

To expand their leadership capacity and apply what they learned, others have volunteered for or been elected to community and philanthropic board service. In these roles, they report learning the essential lead-

ership skills related to influence without authority.

Thirteen of the 20 have served as mentors and project advisers to the newer classes in this same program. They say that they enjoy maintaining a connection with the program and want to give something back.

One of the participants was selected for a role with the National Organic Standards Board, a branch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

All 22 graduates of the program continue to inspire and motivate the people around them. They pass along what they learned, represent the company well, and show ongoing potential for contributing as leaders to the growth of the company.

### RE-ENGAGING

#### The Coaching Continues

The group described in this Case Study graduated from their formal leadership program in July 2009.

Of the 22 participants in this group, 19 have continued to work with Deb as their coach.

Most participate in group webinars that continue to be highly interactive with small groups. The number of webinars conducted grows each year as more and more of the program alumni come back to participate in topics that are relevant to their current challenges and ongoing development.

Some have worked with Deb in long-term 1-on-1 coaching engagements to pursue their goals and eliminate obstacles.

Many call Deb for occasional coaching, turning to her as a resource who can offer an objective perspective and candid feedback along with insightful questions to help clarify what they want to do.

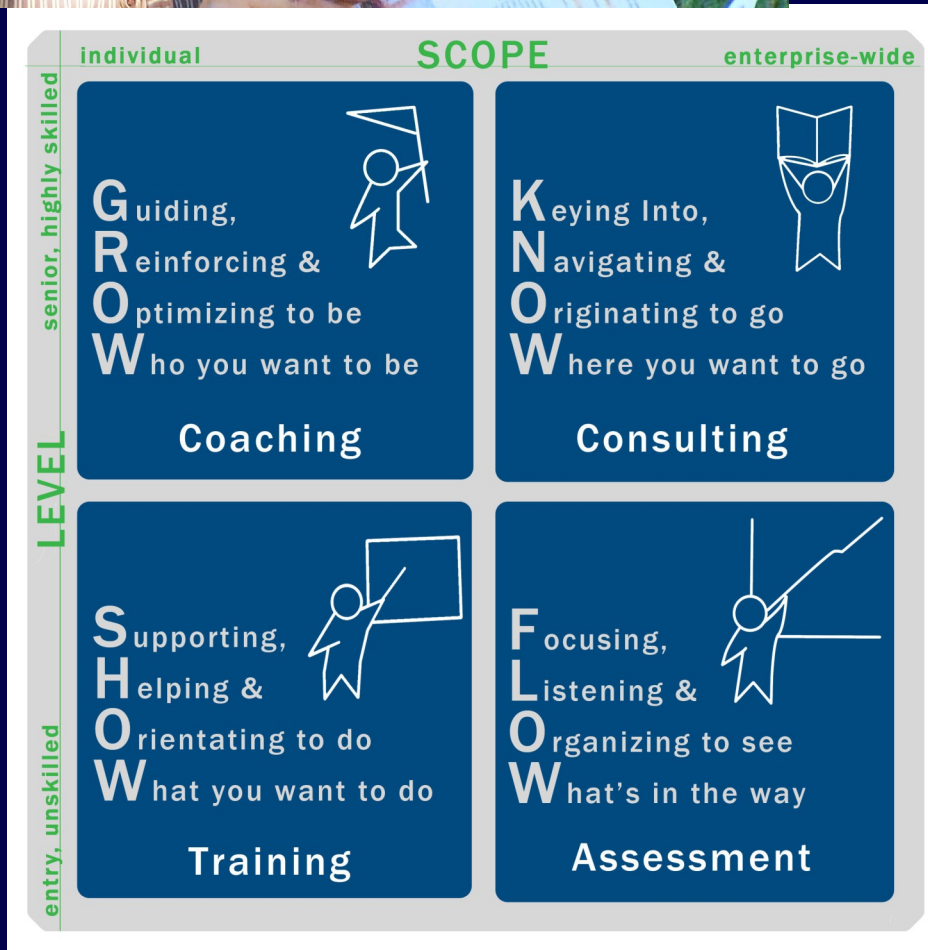
One graduate hired Deb for a year-long intensive coaching engagement with the entire management team of his family-owned business.

## Coaching in the Company 3 Years Later

After the first year, described in this Case Study, how has the Coaching component of this program evolved?

As the number of program alumni grows each year, there was a capacity issue that needed to be addressed. Because coaching works, the company decided to expand the coaching focus of this program. Instead of Deb doing all the coaching, she is teaching the current class members to coach one another. They work in Accountability Teams to provide 1-on-1 coaching using John Whitmore's GROW model, along with Deb's feedback and active listening models. They attended training with Deb on active listening and active inquiry. As they coach each other, they also provide feedback to each other (coaching the coach). Deb remains a resource and continues to conduct the group coaching webinar sessions. With more people learning to coach, the hope is that the organization will be able to create a coaching culture worldwide.





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