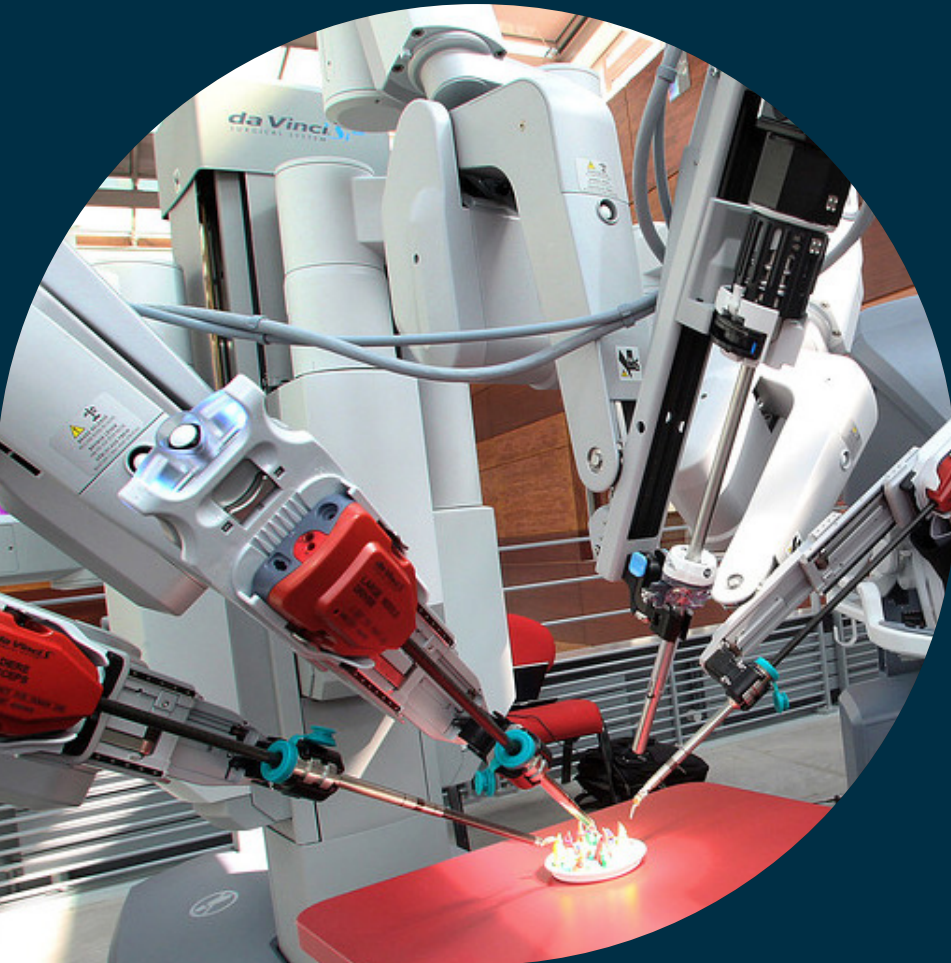




“We thought we had set a pretty aggressive initial goal of reducing that ramp-up time by 20 percent—but I’m happy to say that we’ve actually reduced the time by 40 percent.”

Client Story

Improving Leadership Skills for Sales Leaders

Does training sales leaders and managers in fundamental leadership skills create a competitive edge? Duke Moseley, director of sales leadership development at Intuitive Surgical, thinks so. “As business becomes more complex and we hire new people, it’s critical to give our sales leaders a method for increasing the effectiveness of the conversations they have with their direct reports. They need to be able to coach their people through tasks and help them improve performance every day.”

Intuitive Surgical develops, manufactures, and markets robotic products designed to improve clinical outcomes for patients through minimally invasive surgery, most notably with the da Vinci Surgical System. Employees work with the credo of “striving for meaningful progress daily.” Senior leadership realized that they could positively influence performance by providing leadership training for their sales professionals.

“I’ve been with the company for about 10 years,” says Moseley. “Most of us were using SLII® language when managing our teams, but I realized we hadn’t delivered training in that particular program in a long time. Twice a year, we bring managers and directors together as part of our leadership development program. Our senior leadership team decided that was the perfect opportunity to offer SLII® training to the larger group. We wanted sales leaders and managers to be able to use the language and skills seamlessly to support our culture of developing people.”



Duke Moseley

SLII® trains leaders how to provide the right amount of support and direction to each team member as they navigate certain tasks. It focuses on teaching leaders how to have productive conversations that empower their direct reports to achieve goals.

“With the help of 15 facilitators from Blanchard, we trained 275 people in one day. They embraced the concepts quickly. Part of that acceptance was credited to the Blanchard staff, who learned our business terms and used our language to make the learning come alive. Being able to insert our titles such as ASM, CSM, and CSR, along with terms like milestone activities and greenfield system into the exercises and examples, gave Blanchard credibility with our learners. That helped them easily transfer the skills back on the job,” says Moseley. Since the initial face-to-face training, six people have attended Blanchard’s SLII® Training for Trainers program and continue to deliver ongoing training as new people are hired or promoted into leadership roles.

After the training, Moseley launched a 13-week sustainment program consisting of weekly emails that remind participants to use resources available through Blanchard Exchange. These tools help people master the SLII® skills and include forms for one-on-one meetings, conversation starters, articles, videos, and more.

Intuitive Surgical offered Coaching Essentials® to frontline managers as a follow up to SLII®. This program teaches managers a coaching process they can use to create an environment of trust and help their direct reports develop autonomy. It was delivered virtually in three 2-hour sessions. A recent survey of Intuitive Surgical managers and direct reports indicate that 85 percent of people strongly agree they are having better coaching conversations, are performing better, and are committed to staying with the organization.

Selling and supporting the da Vinci Surgical System is complex. Intuitive Surgical estimates it takes about 15 months for a new salesperson to produce at the highest level. The company’s goal with this training was to reduce people’s time to proficiency by 20 percent. “Every sales leader knows the importance of helping their

people reach quotas in the shortest amount of time,” says Moseley. “We thought we had set a pretty aggressive initial goal of reducing that ramp-up time by 20 percent—but I’m happy to say that we’ve actually reduced the time by 40 percent. This has had a huge positive impact on individual sales people, the sales team, and the entire organization.”



Success Stories from the Field

A specific group of managers is responsible for handling the integration of new hires for Intuitive Surgical. Prior to incorporating SLII® into the culture, performance was based on quantity, not quality. “We have a set of milestone activities people must achieve,” says Moseley. “In the past, we measured those with a checklist based on quantity. Now that we have mapped SLII® development levels to each of those skills, both the sales person and their manager have specific information about performance levels. This opens the opportunity for stronger, more effective conversations and coaching to take place. So instead of measuring how many times someone has completed a task, we can measure the quality of their efforts. It’s more meaningful for everyone.”

Sales leaders have created a scorecard that maps development levels of the six core sales competencies for each direct report. It provides

a simple visual for use during one-on-one conversations. Now every person knows exactly how they are performing on each competency and what they need to do to improve performance.

Sal Gagliardo, clinical sales director, shares a story of how putting SLII® skills into practice had a positive impact on both his direct report and his role as a leader. “I hired a very tenured sales person who had been an outstanding performer; however, he wasn’t successful in this new role. His results were not meeting my expectations. I was frustrated, he was frustrated, and I finally had to put him on a performance plan. I gave him very specific goals with specific timelines—and guess what? He crushed it! I realized that although this person had been successful in another role, he was at Development Level 1 with this new job and he needed a Style 1 leadership from me. When I gave him the highly directive leadership style he needed, he outperformed my expectations. And he continues to be a star performer.”

Understanding that people need different styles of leadership as they perform different tasks is critical to successful performance.

Another example comes from Chad Miller, clinical sales director. “When I brought in a new sales person, I learned how damaging it can be to make assumptions about people. Because that person was experienced, I assumed he had the skills he needed, so I used a delegating leadership style. When I saw him struggling, I stepped back and started to ask a few questions. This helped me realize that even though he was experienced, he needed a Style 1—more direction—in this new role. Never underestimate the importance of asking questions to determine what your direct reports need.”

Miller also uses SLII® skills when training doctors how to use the da Vinci Surgical System. “SLII® teaches that leaders need to use different leadership styles with people as they go through a development continuum while learning new tasks. I have found this concept helpful when working with doctors. They start out very excited, but naturally face some challenges before mastering the process. By using SLII® skills, I can be right there with them every step of the way, giving them direction and support as they need it.”

Intuitive Surgical made the decision to invest in their people by providing leadership training—and, clearly, it is making a positive difference. “It is almost impossible to go through SLII® training and not become a more effective leader,” says Moseley. “I see it in the language, behavior, and performance of our people every day. Now it is part of our culture. All I have to say to people is this: the longer you wait to use SLII®, the more you are missing out. Start today—because it is going to impact your business.”

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