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Dr. Melia Stockham, Director of Workforce and Leadership Development

Client Story

Building Culture Through Coaching: How Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas Reinvented Senior Leader Development

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas had invested in leadership development for nearly two decades. SLII® had been part of the organization’s leadership language for years, with groups of leaders participating annually in a competency-based program designed to build bench strength.

But a new enterprise priority shifted the stakes. Employee experience had been identified as a fundamental success factor. The organization committed to eight behavioral competencies that would define how employees and leaders show up across the enterprise. The question became clear:

How do you bring senior leaders into a new competency model in a way that feels meaningful, not repetitive? And how do you justify the time commitment at the most senior levels of the organization?

Dr. Melia Stockham, Director of Workforce and Leadership Development, knew the answer couldn’t be “more of the same.”



Dr. Melia Stockham

The Insight: Coaching Makes Leadership Language Stick

Stockham went back to senior leaders who had participated in an earlier leadership development cohort and asked a simple question: What mattered most?

The answer was consistent. Coaching.

Leaders said their individual coaching relationships were the most impactful part of the program. Many described their coaches as instrumental in helping translate SLII® from theory into daily leadership practice.

Leaders didn't just understand the model. They began leading with it.

Participants shared overwhelmingly positive feedback about the transformation they were experiencing through coaching.

The impact was significant:

- 7 of 8 participants extended their coaching
- Multiple participants earned a promotion
- One leader expanded coaching to include his team of five leaders

They shared that coaching increased their confidence, strengthened their leadership voice, and helped them shift behaviors to be more intentional and strategic. Several noted improved relationships with senior leaders, stronger alignment across leadership teams, and greater collaboration. One participant specifically credited coaching with giving them the confidence to pursue their next-level role.

Stockham realized something important: coaching wasn't an add-on. It was the force multiplier that made the leadership language real.

The Solution: A Coach-Infused, 9-Month Senior Leader Experience

Building on the success of the earlier program, Stockham redesigned the next cohort with an even stronger focus on coaching. It combines 1:1 coaching with group coaching to continue investing in Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas leaders both individually and collectively.



The result was the Compass Coaching Cohort, a nine-month experience designed specifically for senior leaders. It integrates enterprise competencies, individual growth goals, and team alignment.

The structure includes:

- Three months of individual coaching sessions
- A facilitated group coaching experience
- Three additional months of individual coaching sessions
- Ongoing cohort connection and peer dialogue

The group coaching component functions as a mastermind-style forum where leaders uncover organizational needs together, increase trust, and share insights in real time. These sessions are followed by internal application sessions led by Stockham, ensuring that learning translates directly into organizational impact.

"The design intentionally balances individual depth with collective culture-building," explains Stockham. "Each leader works toward personal goals tied directly to the eight enterprise competencies. The experience is highly personalized, but leaders move through it together."

Early Indicators of Impact

Leaders are actively engaging with their coaches and with one another. A dedicated Teams channel has become a space where cohort members share insights, reflect on coaching breakthroughs, and recommend resources. The conversations signal something deeper than compliance. They reflect ownership.

“Self-awareness, one of the core competencies, is visibly strengthening,” says Stockham.

“Most importantly, the leadership language is beginning to surface organically in discussions and decision-making. The competencies are not remaining in a document. They are becoming part of how leaders think and talk.”

Why This Model Works

Several elements make this approach effective for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas:

- It aligns directly with enterprise competencies and strategic priorities
- It builds on existing leadership language rather than replacing it
- It respects senior leader time by emphasizing depth over volume
- It uses coaching to accelerate adoption and application
- It strengthens both individual growth and peer trust

The model is not a reset. It is an amplification of leadership capability.

A Culture Lever, Not Just a Program

For Stockham, the goal extends beyond skill-building. “Senior leaders shape culture. When they consistently model shared competencies, those behaviors cascade through managers, supervisors, and individual contributors.

“The Compass Coaching Cohort design creates alignment at the top of the organization.

It reinforces expectations. It builds shared language. It strengthens trust among senior leaders.

“Rather than asking leaders to become something different, it gives them structured space to refine who they already are as leaders and align that identity with the organization’s future.”

At a Glance

- 9-month senior leader experience
- Integrated with 8 enterprise competencies
- Individual 1:1 coaching + group coaching
- Built on 15+ years of SLII® foundation
- Designed to accelerate culture alignment and employee experience

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