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Client Story

Strengthening Culture with Learning in the Flow of Work

St. Luke's Health System made the commitment to invest in leadership development during the first year of the global pandemic. “Some might have considered that a risky move, but we were concerned about the well-being of our team members and wanted to confront the issue of burnout,” says Amanda Broadnax, director talent development. “The healthcare industry faces turmoil regularly, but the pandemic added even more challenge. We needed to double down—to truly invest in our talent and strengthen our culture.”

St. Luke's already offered several leadership development programs, but wanted to take a centralized approach that would provide a consistent method for leaders at all levels of the organization. “We wanted to shift from stand-alone programs to tailored learning journey's that would provide continuous learning over time,” says Broadnax. “We were purposeful about developing specific skills for distinct levels of leaders that were mapped to our identified competencies and aligned to our business strategy.”

They started by defining eight leadership competencies for all talent in the healthcare system—*Optimism, People Centered, Drives Results, Agility, Safety Obsession, Earns Trust, Consumer and Patient Focus, Learns, and Is Curious*. Then they defined the levels of leaders as Leading Self, Leading Others, Leading Leaders, Leading the Function, and Leading the Organization. “All clinical and non-clinical leaders in all settings and at all levels were to be developed, so the real question was where to start,” says Broadnax. “We held focus groups and researched global competencies and best practices for leading others, particularly in a healthcare setting.”



“We quickly decided that because our 800 frontline leaders were at the heart of the storm during the pandemic, addressing their well-being and burnout was critical. This was the urgent need we wanted to address. Our people are geographically dispersed, and they work in disruptive settings. They can be called out to the patient floors at any moment, for many reasons, so capturing their mindshare was going to be a challenge.”

To create the learning design, St. Luke’s developed a persona of the frontline leader they would be developing. “We defined the learner as a newly promoted leader who was previously a peer to some of their new team members. They lead a technically strong team of tenured, capable people. They are transitioning to become a person of influence while maintaining great levels of trust and respect with their team. They are shifting from being a person working on a team to the person leading the team and helping their team members reach their goals,” says Broadnax.

The Catalyst Journey

Once the learner was clearly defined, the next step was creating learning experiences that would provide fundamental leadership development. The result is called the Catalyst Journey for Leading Others—a ten-week journey of live virtual sessions with prework and peer coaching sessions built into the design. The kickoff session orients the learner to the technology and design of the program. It is intended to remove any barriers to technology or schedules so that learners can have the best learning experience possible. The design includes content from several Blanchard programs, including:

- DiSC® is a personality assessment tool that helps improve communication skills for leaders and their teams.
- SLII® teaches leaders how to empower their people to succeed by offering the right amount of direction and support needed on specific tasks.
- Coaching Essentials® teaches managers how to effectively coach their direct reports, not just manage them, to increase productivity and create an environment of trust and autonomy.
- Conversational Capacity® teaches people how to have constructive dialogue, especially when challenging situations arise.
- Leading People Through Change® teaches participants how to identify and address the predictable stages employees go through during any change initiative.

“For week ten, we created an experience where the learners reflect on what they’ve learned and share examples about how they are applying their new skills. We provide performance support tools they can access through the Percipio platform to help keep the learning alive. And it’s all topped off with a celebratory graduation,” says Broadnax. “Overall, we found the evidence-based, extensively researched models and frameworks provided the fundamental skills we needed to develop. The fact that we were able to contextualize the content for our leaders in healthcare is what has made this initiative so successful.”

"Additionally, the Catalyst program's design and thoughtful content curation for learners has provided a foundation for our leaders as they move into additional leadership responsibilities within the health system," says Leah Goede, a sr. program manager for St. Luke's Rise Journey, designed for Leaders of Leaders. "It has created a springboard for common language and culture across the health system that we have leveraged in our tiered leadership development approach. In greater service of this, I believe the program could potentially become a foundational pre-requisite for participation in our other development journeys."

Facilitation of the Catalyst Journey

Trey Jones and Lisa Desilet, talent program managers for St. Luke's, are the facilitators of the Catalyst Journey. Initially, they worked as a team—one as facilitator and the other as producer. "We use Zoom to deliver the content," says Jones. "Although Lisa and I started delivering the program as a team, we're able to facilitate individually now. We have about 18 participants in a cohort and manage four cohorts at once. We check in with each other every week to see how things are going and if we need to make any modifications. We keep the learner in mind every step of the way, so we take a hard look at every exercise and activity to make sure it will help them develop as a leader. We also address different learning styles by giving them access to learning in many ways—worksheets, articles, breakouts, and videos, along with virtual instructor-led training."

"We stay with a cohort throughout their program, so we get very connected to the learners," says Desilet. "That's important because the content brings a certain level of vulnerability, and we want to get the learners comfortable working together quickly. It requires a great deal of trust among the learners as well as the facilitator."

Jones and Desilet are quick to understand the importance of the work they are doing. "I knew some of our people were struggling with burnout and this content would be helpful. But I worried whether they would be able to commit to it. As it turns out, that wasn't an issue," says Jones.

"The content was adapted for our healthcare environment, which made a significant difference to our learners," says Desilet. "Some of them work night shifts but showed up for the session offered during the day. The level of commitment to learning was remarkable."

The leaders at St. Luke's appreciated the organization making an investment in them and took it seriously. The cohort environment allowed them to build strong relationships across departments. "Each cohort becomes a community of trusted colleagues. They use this relationship to get advice and coaching from each other. By doing so, they create their own network," says Desilet. An alumni channel on an internal platform is also provided for graduates so that they can continue to meet as a peer group and stay connected with others.



Advice from the team at St. Luke's

The team at St. Luke's approached this initiative thoughtfully and purposefully to build the kind of leadership culture that would help them thrive. They learned lessons as they went along.

"Make it a best-in-class offering in every way," says Jones. "Find the right content and the right content partners. Keep learners in mind all through the process and communicate with them frequently. Create an experience that will help them transfer new behaviors to the workplace quickly."

"Only accept the absolute best for your learners," adds Desilet. "If you can't provide the best content and learning experience, don't start the initiative until you can. Build in connection and engagement methods, such as social media, that mimic what people are familiar with."

The goal of any learning program is to lead people on a journey to create behavior change. It is critical to keep focused on the mindset, skillset and behaviors they need to develop and to make the learning exciting.

"Remind learners that you are there to support them every step of the way," says Jones. "Take a moment in every session to be human. Check in to see how they are doing—it's as simple as asking how things are going. That personal moment builds trust and shows empathy. Show up as your authentic self and take them on a wonderful journey."

Results

St. Luke's has enjoyed impressive results in the first year, including graduating 156 leaders. "We are proud of how many graduates have been through the ten-week journey. Asking leaders to meet two times a week for two hours can be a challenge, but our leaders averaged 97% attendance across all sessions," says Broadnax.

Additionally, 98% of participants said the program met or exceeded their expectations and 100% said they would recommend it to others. Overall, St. Luke's has seen a 2% improvement in employee engagement.

Because the organization wanted to see if direct reports noticed a positive difference in their leaders' behaviors, the direct reports were polled both before and after their leaders took the training. The good news is that improvement was seen in all categories. "The 156 leaders who graduated manage 1000 direct reports," says Broadnax. "We asked those people how their leaders support them. With improved scores in all areas impacting 1000 employees, we know we are doing the right thing and making a positive difference in people's lives."

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