



# What could the future hold

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## Client Story

# Launching a Next Level Leadership Learning Journey for Sales

American biopharmaceutical AbbVie is focused on discovering and delivering transformational medicines of the highest quality to improve the health of humankind. And their commitment doesn't stop there—they are equally dedicated to delivering sustainable solutions that improve the health of their business and their employees, to better serve their customers.

AbbVie understands the important role its leaders play in the company's success and offers SLII® training as its foundational development program to build skills for leaders at all levels. Because AbbVie focuses on continuous improvement and feedback cycles, the team realized more training is needed for sales leaders. “We took a hard look at a day, week, and month in the life of our district managers so we could identify pain points,” says Anjum Abbasi-Voight, director, leadership development. “We learned they wanted more effective coaching from their leaders and more practice to become even stronger coaches themselves. The job of a sales leader is to coach their people to peak performance, and we knew we could help them improve their coaching skills.”

Abbasi-Voight worked with Blanchard® to create and pilot a learning journey to be delivered virtually to a group of district managers who would be partnered with a regional director to lead smaller groups. The skills would be presented and practiced in four intervals, each lasting four weeks.



Anjum Abbasi-Voight

The pilot led to enhancements and refinements that identified the first step as assessing leadership strengths and areas of improvement. “We launched the Leader Action Profile (LAPII) as a pre-assessment to measure how effectively participants were using the directive and supportive skills of SLII®.

It helped them understand where their skills were effective and where they could be improved, as assessed by their own direct reports,” says Abbasi-Voight.

The journey was structured to increase communication between the members of blended, cross-business cohorts. The first week is dedicated to understanding content through self-paced learning items to introduce the concepts. During the second week, participants meet to share what they have learned and set goals through a facilitated discussion with the regional leader. They go on to apply those learnings in real-work situations during week three, using tools and performance support provided. They all come together in the fourth week to report out how they have applied their skills, to share challenges and successes, and to reflect on how they will continue to lead as coaches. “The fourth week of the journey became a coaching circle for participants as they shared tips and ideas with other members of the cohort. The learn, talk, apply, talk model worked really well,” says Abbasi-Voight.

## Improving the Experience in Real Time

Level one measurement data was positive. The first interval focuses on the individual learner by presenting the Self Leadership training program from Blanchard. Participants learn the importance of being responsible for their own success by being proactive, challenging assumed constraints, and activating their points of power. The highly interactive experience uses videos, games, stories, and activities to teach people how to set effective goals and how to ask for the direction and support they need to reach those goals. Participants learn how to lead themselves so



that they can lead others.

The second interval shifts to teaching participants how to build trusting relationships and go deeper on managing performance by combining SLII® skills with the coaching framework AbbVie uses.

“Trust is the foundation, which is why we put it first. Then we blended the concepts of SLII® with our coaching framework. This provides a powerful method for determining the approach for each person at each coaching stage as well as making it easy to use the questions from our coaching model during development conversations between direct reports and leaders. It gives everyone the ability to have more effective and constructive conversations using the same language and approach across a large sales organization,” concludes Abbasi-Voight.

The third and fourth intervals of the journey drill down on specific coaching and communication skills from Blanchard’s Coaching Essentials® training program. Interval three focuses on developing powerful listening skills by learning how to:

- **Listen to Learn:** Listen intently to what is said—and what is left unspoken. This helps reveal the person’s values, beliefs, goals, concerns, and more.
- **Inquire for Insight:** Ask probing questions that encourage the person to examine

beliefs, behaviors, and assumptions. This leads to new perspectives and behaviors.

Interval four teaches how to deliver effective feedback by learning how to:

- **Tell Your Truth:** Speak openly with direct kindness. This can cut to the heart of the issue at hand.
- **Express Confidence:** Champion the person's efforts. This inspires greater levels of achievement.

"We have been training our leaders in SLII® for years—but combining it with additional leadership content and experiences creates a comprehensive, foundational learning journey. It allows leaders throughout the enterprise to use a common leadership language and have better conversations with their people," explains Abbasi-Voight.

At the end of the learning journey, AbbVie used the LAPII assessment again to measure the effectiveness of the training. "The participants knew we would be asking their direct reports for feedback, so we encouraged them to explain the training process to their staff. We wanted the leaders to tell their people what they would be learning and how they would be applying it so they could gauge changed behavior fairly at the end of the process. We all know that the real measure of effectiveness will be from the point of view of the direct reports. And we've found that leaders are usually harder on themselves, so this will be valuable data," says Abbasi-Voight.

## The Learning Journey

When AbbVie piloted the program, they selected high performers to go through the experience with the understanding that their feedback would be used to make necessary design, content, and experience changes. "We intentionally conducted the pilot with too much content because we wanted the learners to help us narrow down what would be the most beneficial to them. They helped us determine what was critical to learn immediately, and what could be included as additional resources

to extend and sustain the learning," says Abbasi-Voight.

"The discussion sessions were unstructured in the pilot by design. Those sessions were facilitated by regional directors who gave us feedback that conversation guides would be helpful to keep discussions moving productively. So we created a facilitator deck filled with tips to help the conversations stay focused."

Members of the pilot group made short videos explaining the important skills they were learning, which helped create momentum and a stronger WIIFM (what's in it for me) for those in the program. The videos were used when the program was rolled out to the entire organization. "Getting leaders to share what they are learning and talk about the experience helped us launch the program on a larger scale," says Abbasi-Voight.

The learning journey has now been rolled out across 16 businesses to more than 400 leaders responsible for around 4,000 colleagues across the U.S. "A big advantage of the virtual experience is the ability to get people together from different businesses across the enterprise for learning. The participants loved meeting and working with people outside their normal structure. They quickly understood that, regardless of the exact business they are in, they are all managing people—and that has its own challenges. They could build new relationships while focusing on improving their leadership skills, which is a benefit to the entire organization," says Abbasi-Voight. "Above all, we will keep listening to feedback and keep improving the experience."

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