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Client Story

Determining the ROI of SLII® at Delta Dental of California

Delta Dental of California and its affiliated companies are dedicated to advancing oral health by providing dental insurance to nearly one-third of the U.S. population. Internally, the organization is dedicated to increasing the skills of its leaders by offering leadership development to support the corporate culture.

“We had delivered various leadership training classes, but we didn’t have a touchstone for the fundamental basics of leadership that defines what it means to be a leader at Delta Dental,” says Ben Sieke, director, talent development and learning. “We wanted a unifying philosophy for leaders to follow and a program to give them the skills to lead their teams effectively.”

After an intensive search, they selected SLII® from Blanchard® as the foundation of their leadership development program.

“The program needed to fit with our values and be compatible with the competencies we had identified for our leaders. SLII® was the solution the senior leadership team selected,” says Sieke. The Delta Dental team got the buy-in from senior leaders up front because they wanted all employees to understand the importance of this initiative.



Ben Sieke



James Sigismonti

This wasn't just another training program, but a philosophy for building leaders throughout the company. The talent development and learning and communications teams played an important role in relaying this message to both leaders and direct reports.

"The joint effort of our talent development and learning, and communications teams helped us get the word out and did a great job of setting this up," says Sieke. "The communications team created a campaign to launch the program internally that included videos and ongoing messages in our newsletter to keep the message top of mind. We wanted everyone to understand the "why" of this and the importance to the organization. The initial video featured Sarah Chavarria, chief people officer, sharing information about the impact the organization anticipated from this initiative. Two animated videos were created; one for the leaders who would be going through the training to set up expectations for the learning experience, and another for their direct reports to explain what their leaders would be learning and what that meant to them. Also, the company's internal website features spotlights on a continuing basis that share specific examples of the impact SLII® is having on people.



The talent development and learning team worked with our People Organizational Effectiveness consultants to pilot the program then work with our business leaders to make sure they attended the workshops and started adopting the important practices."

The Rollout

The initial design for the delivery of SLII® included a one-day face-to-face session followed by online sessions; however, COVID changed that. "We wanted to deliver this training ourselves, but the virtual delivery added complications for us. When you are delivering in tight two-hour increments, you have to be mindful of the pacing. The Blanchard staff took our people through a virtual training-for-trainers program and then worked one on one with our trainers to prepare them," explains James Sigismonti, manager, leadership development. "From the beginning, we thought about the follow-up pieces we would use from Blanchard Exchange to reinforce the learning. And we are using the Kenbot™ to give people access to help in moments of need."

The Blanchard Exchange platform offers a set of tools—including forms for one-on-one meetings, conversation starters, articles, videos, and more—that help leaders master the skills of SLII®. Kenbot™ is a chatbot that provides on-demand support through Microsoft Teams. Leaders can text a question and receive the support they need immediately with answers to frequently asked questions and links to relevant videos, worksheets, and tools.

"Our HR business partners were among the first people we trained so that they would be able to support other leaders as they went through the sessions," says Sigismonti. More than 249 leaders have completed the SLII® training and Delta Dental continues to fill classes as they are offered.

Measurement and Results

From the beginning of the initiative, Delta Dental wanted to measure the effectiveness of the training to be able to determine the impact to the organization. They partnered with Blanchard and Dr. Paul Leone of MeasureUp Consulting to determine the results. Using a post-training survey that measured self-reported data from participants along with corroborating data from their bosses and direct reports, the 6-level measurement strategy was based on these questions:

1. Were participants engaged with the training experience?
2. Did participants gain new and valuable insights into how they can be better, more influential leaders?
3. Did participants apply those insights and improve critical leader behaviors on the job two to three months after the training?
4. Did these participants affect their team's business performance? What were the benefits?
5. Did the overall benefits outweigh the costs of training?
6. How did the participants' manager involvement affect the overall impact and return on investment (ROI) of the training?



The first question measures Level 1—the overall satisfaction of learners. Results indicated that 93 percent of the participants were engaged in the training experience and 97 percent would recommend it to others. Overall, participants rated both the course and the facilitator a 4.7 out of 5.

Even more impressive was the 98 percent response on the Level 2 evaluation question, which measures learning. Most participants felt they learned new and valuable information about using SLII®.

For Level 3 evaluation, participants were asked if they were able to apply new skills back on the job and 87 percent said they had applied new skills. Three months after training, leaders and direct reports were surveyed and results indicated that 76 percent of the leaders had made clear improvements in their leadership, with specific progress in listening to team member needs, setting clear performance expectations, and praising a job well done.

“For Level 4 data, we asked participants and direct reports if they saw an improvement in the overall performance of their team and, if so, at what level,” says Sigismonti. Eighty-seven percent of participants said the new leader behaviors improved the performance of their team and estimated that it had improved by 27 percent. Comparatively, 90 percent of direct reports said they observed the improved leader behaviors and estimated that improved team performance by 25 percent. Individual team members reported that their leader's new skills helped their own performance improve by 60 percent. These results prove that not only did leaders see an improvement in their ability to use SLII® skills to influence higher team performance, individual team members also recognized they were able to improve their own performance because of their leader's expanded skills.

Level 5 data is calculated by multiplying the percentage of overall performance improvement by the average number of direct reports who observed improvement in their leader's behaviors, then multiplying that number by the average number of direct reports who say their leader's improvements increased their own performance. This determines the average improvement of performance per participant directly attributable to training, which came to 11 percent. Using Dr. Leone's calculations based on salaries and the 11 percent increase in performance, Delta Dental realized a return on investment of 153 percent.

The Level 6* evaluation looks at "climate factors" (elements of the organizational culture) that can maximize the ROI of training. This theory measures the impact on participants whose managers provided high support for their training versus those whose managers provided low support. Participants whose managers were more supportive of their learning had more than double the amount of business impact than did participants with less supportive managers. Leaders at Delta Dental with higher manager support resulted in 82 percent improvement in leader behaviors and 35 percent improvement in team performance.

Overall, the results show that of the leaders who received training, 91 percent are more engaged in their leadership role and 74 percent are more committed to stay at Delta Dental. Additionally, because of the improved skills of their leaders, 62 percent of direct reports are more engaged and 84 percent are more committed to staying.

"I think these positive results are the product of the thoughtful preparation that went into this entire initiative," says Sigismonti. "We wanted SLII® to serve as our leadership philosophy. We had buy-in and support from senior leaders and our HR business partners, and our communications team helped us launch the program and keep it alive with ongoing messaging."

To take the learning a step further, Delta Dental is rolling out executive coaching from Blanchard® to reinforce SLII® skills. "We looked at several coaching programs, but it just made sense to go with the Blanchard coaching since it is so strongly linked to SLII®," says Sieke. With this robust program in place, Delta Dental has defined what they expect from leaders in their company and has equipped them with the skills and tools to lead an engaged workforce.

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At a Glance

Level	Measured	Method	Results
Level 1	Satisfaction	Survey	93% of participants were engaged and 97% would recommend the training.
Level 2	Learning	Level 2 questions added to survey	98% of participants learned new skills.
Level 3	On-the-job Improvement	Multi-rater survey	87% of participants applied new skills on the job. 76% of direct reports saw their leaders apply new skills.
Level 4	Business impact	Performance data from participants and direct reports	87% of participants saw an improvement in team performance of 27%. 90% of direct reports saw an improvement in team performance of 25%. 60% of direct reports saw an improvement in their own performance.
Level 5	ROI	Monetized Level 4 data	11% increase in overall team performance resulting in an ROI of 156%.
Level 6	Transfer climate	Analysis of manager support	Participants who received high support from their leaders saw 87% improvement in leader behaviors and 35% improvement in team performance.

*Dr. Paul Leone created the 6th level of measurement, which won the 2019 Brandon Hall Gold Award for best advance in measuring the impact of leadership training. Level 6 is described in Leone's book, *Measuring and Maximizing Training Impact: Bridging the Gap between Training and Business Result*.