

Blue Shield of California Partners with Ninth House to Engage and Empower Employees

CUSTOMER:
Blue Shield of California

INDUSTRY:
Health Insurance

ORGANIZATION SIZE:
4500 Employees

THE CHALLENGE:
Deliver on newly established company mission, brand and culture by empowering employees and increasing engagement.

THE OBJECTIVES:

- Enable managers with the skills to motivate and empower their employees as independent workers that are ready for their next work challenge
- Design a unique learning solution that ignites effective, on-going communication between managers and employees
- Engage key company leaders as facilitators of a new learning program

THE RESULTS

- Over two hundred of five hundred managers have successfully completed the *Leading for Empowerment* blended learning program
- Coaching sessions confirm that newly acquired knowledge and skills are being successfully applied on the job

THE SOLUTION SUMMARY

In a historically traditional industry that is highly regulated, Blue Shield of California (BSCA) sought to differentiate itself by invigorating its brand and company culture. The new brand would position the organization as an insurance provider that is not only cost competitive but also forward thinking and easy to do business with – a company that “gets it”. In parallel, an internal culture shift was required to focus more on excellence in company process and driving employees to be at their productive best. An organization-wide employee survey indicated that to achieve this, a more engaged and empowered workforce was needed.

BSCA partnered with Ninth House to design and implement a blended learning and development program that was more than just another training event. Leveraging Ken Blanchard’s *Situational Leadership*^{® II}, the program was implemented from the top-down with a unique design for each level of management. Using a blend of interactive online media, face-to-face discussion, and virtual coaching sessions, BSCA is driving employee engagement and empowerment and as a result, realizing an increase in organization-wide performance and productivity.

THE SOLUTION SPECIFICS

The new learning initiative, called *Leading for Empowerment*, had two objectives: (1) deliver a learning program to equip managers with skills to engage and empower their employees, and (2) foster an environment that encourages continuous adoption of new knowledge, skills and attitudes. *The Situational Leadership II* model had already been used successfully within the organization and was chosen by the BSCA HR team as the foundation upon which *Leading for Empowerment* would be built.

The company interviewed other Ninth House clients to garner best practices and lessons learned, then partnered with Ninth House to design and develop a custom blended learning program that was innovative and engaging. The implementation strategy incorporated unique designs for each of BSCA’s audience groups.

- **Executives:** An executive from The Ken Blanchard Companies facilitated a session with the BSCA leaders to educate the team on the *Situational Leadership II* model and the *Leading for Empowerment* strategy.
- **Leaders as facilitators:** Twelve top business and HR leaders were selected to complete the blended program as learners and then received training to co-facilitate the program for others.



- Managers: Five hundred managers are to participate in the full *Leading for Empowerment* program which includes five key elements.
 1. Complete the online baseline Multi-Rater Assessment and a portion of *Situational Leadership II* online course
 2. Attend a one-day learning lab to complete the remainder of *Situational Leadership II* with colleagues in a leader-led session
 3. Apply new knowledge and skills on the job
 4. Reinforce learning by participating in a coaching session via teleconference to share successes and challenges with colleagues
 5. Complete the follow-up Multi-rater Assessment five months after completing the baseline

Delivering a highly successful implementation of the program is a primary objective for BSCA HR in 2008. Within four months two hundred of the five hundred managers had completed the first four components of the program. And it has gained significant momentum evidenced by the continuous level of participation.

Initial feedback by participants indicates it has substantially improved key manager skills. Leaders of teams who have participated in the program have reported the following outcomes:

- Decreased time spent redirecting employees
- Improved coaching preparation and implementation
- Increased level of effective task delegation
- Increased number of discussions about development levels and leadership styles
- Improved communication with direct reports
- Increased confidence in his/her own competence as a leader

As the initiative continues, and the remainder of the five hundred managers completes the program, the follow-up component of the Multi-Rater Assessment will provide more tangible data to determine the full impact of the program.