



Develop Your Leader Bench Strength



Children's Healthcare of Atlanta had two challenges: hiring more leaders and a learning process to help them understand and develop skills to manage the complex system.

Children's Healthcare of Atlanta averted a looming leader shortfall by growing crucial leader bench strength — and justified the effort by making a significant positive impact on broad business metrics.

Challenge:

Children's Healthcare of Atlanta is highly regarded as one of the nation's top pediatric hospitals. In 2004, Children's faced two challenges that required a change in its approach to leadership bench strength development.

First, the Atlanta area pediatric market was the fastest growing in the country and threatened to grow beyond the hospital's ability to provide services. Children's needed more leaders than it could possibly hire and assimilate effectively. Second, healthcare was becoming increasingly complex. Children's needed leaders who understood the Children's multiple hospital system and had the skills to drive change throughout the growing organization.

Vice President and Chief Learning Officer Larry Mohl put it simply, "The organization was going to have a tremendous leadership gap."

Solution At a Glance:

Mohl's solution was straightforward: instead of struggling to hire talent, Children's should grow its own. His vision was a Center for Leadership that would address leadership learning, succession planning, and talent management. Leaders would be grown from the bottom up and share a common language, methods, and tools for success. Learning would be provided for leaders at every organizational level.

But how would Mohl get funding? Children's was highly committed to developing its people, but resources in this nonprofit organization were scarce and carefully managed. The Board would approve funding only if metrics showed how the leader training was supporting critical organizational goals. In short, Mohl needed proof of business impact.

Advantage Performance Partner Carol Bunn explains, "A believer in our Advantage Way approach, High Impact Learning (HIL) and Success Case Method, Larry now had a process to transform learning from a series of highly customized training experiences to a true business improvement process."

The acclaimed Advantage Way process is capped by a Success Case Evaluation Method that assesses — literally proves — how business metrics are affected by the learning people have received.

Process:

Approximately 100 participants were randomly divided into control and experimental training groups. All participants experienced a three-day leadership training program followed by three, one-on-one coaching sessions. Both groups had identical learning experiences, except that the experimental group and their managers participated in *The Advantage Way* process. Using this process, managers of participants in the experimental group attended a brief, facilitated session to help their direct reports link the leadership development training directly to business goals.

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Afterwards, managers and their direct reports completed an Impact Map that helped the training participants create focus and business purpose. During this important dialogue, managers helped participants plan where to apply new learning back on the job, and understand how this would improve the participants’ individual results, contribute to team results, and impact overall organizational goals. The managers reported that this dialogue, supported by *The Advantage Way* process and tools, was instrumental in helping them get alignment on unit and job goals. One manager put it simply, “At last, a simple tool that can make training work!” Managers and their direct reports also committed to a support and action planning strategy that they completed after training.

Get People On Board

The leadership initiative would demand time and attention from every leader within Children’s, so Mohl took pains to create buy-in at every level. He invited the senior team to lay all their issues on the table early and often. Throughout the initiative, Mohl and Linda Matzigkeit, Children’s SVP of Human Resources, focused on transparency and making improvements as needed. “We consistently shared what was and was not working, and encouraged everyone involved to do the same,” Mohl recalls.

The Advantage Way process itself creates buy-in even before learning begins. Participants’ managers help decide what business impact the learning needs to make and are shown how the post-training Success Case and additional follow-up activities will make sure learning is applied to create business results.

Grow Your Own Leaders

The new Center for Leadership was launched as a 16-month learning experience. This included three levels of custom leadership development and five executive-level workshops. After each workshop, Success Cases determined how the learning was working.

“The Success Case helps you understand where success is occurring and to what degree,” Bunn explains, “We look for the ‘success thread’ — from the learning concept all the way through application and then to the business impact. We are also focused on identifying any unrealized impact from the learning so that changes are quickly made to expand the success even further.”

The initiative included engaging activities and themes, often called Winning Hearts and Minds, that resonated for all the

leader participants. Winning Minds referred to Success Case interviews that showed the effort participants had put into applying new skills to generate business results. Winning Hearts referred to creating pride and commitment — and celebrating current leadership success and future aspirations.



The “Leadership Next” final workshop focused on building an internal leadership community. It included a celebration where leader participants posted notes of accomplishment and aspiration on a “Wall of Success” bearing images of children and their families that had been served by Children’s.

Impact on Multiple Business Streams

The Center’s first year of leadership development brought results even broader than expected. “This was a real celebration for everyone involved,” says Bunn. “We saw a significant impact on leaders from a personal perspective, on the system as a whole, on the financials, and on operating as an even stronger leader in the national pediatric community.”

Mohl adds, “All attributed the Center for Leadership as a key component of these new developments.” To wit:

- Personal impacts included strong competency improvements and a core of leaders ready to move up to the next level — dramatic new leadership bench strength.
- System impacts included internal hiring increased from 40% to 57% and leader retention increased significantly in critical roles. Participating leaders also achieved better retention rates in their organization than in the broader system.
- Financial impacts were dramatic. “The total value of cost savings and cost avoidance were in the multimillions of dollars, as was the incremental revenue and external funding,” says Mohl.
- Operational impacts included optimized staffing; creation of effective leadership teams; improved service scores; and increased safety, efficiency, and effectiveness of care. The leadership training also expanded partnerships, grew services, and created a needed distribution blueprint.

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“It is truly exciting to create this much impact on all four streams of business measurement, with great balance,” says Bunn. “This is a significant performance record in pediatric healthcare.”

Make Leader Development a Priority

The business impact metrics provided by the Success Case Method measurement process gave Mohl the proof he needed to fund the Center on an annual basis. “This approach puts leadership development on equal footing with every other major initiative designed to take the organization to the next level,” he says.

The Center for Leadership results met the organization’s crucial market challenges. Bunn explains, “Children’s achieved their goals. Now they are able to develop their own leaders. They have

dramatically increased their leader bench strength. They are also better able to attract and retain the healthcare leaders that will assist them in driving needed system changes going forward.”

The leadership initiative was significantly expanded after the first year and senior management is now more committed than ever. The connection between learning and business results made all the difference.

“Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta believes in putting processes in place that are really meaningful to their business,” says Bunn. “The Center for Leadership learning initiative is a winning approach to internal development that they will continue to carry forward.” ♦

