

Medical Center Moves the Entire Organization from Good to Great

THE PROBLEM

The Organization Development & Training team at the University of Washington Medical Center, weren't satisfied. The Medical Center was consistently ranked among the top dozen medical centers in the United States as rated by *U.S. News & World Report's "America's Best Hospitals"* and near the top of all medical schools in federal research funding.

But many of the medical center's leaders felt compelled, in the midst of healthcare's ever-increasingly competitive landscape, to take their operation to the next level.

"Being an academic medical center, there is a strong desire here to learn," says Kurt O'Brien, manager of organization development and training. "There is also the realization that if we want to keep improving and getting better, we need to provide our leaders with the necessary skills and tools."

Moving the entire organization forward would require leaders who were up to the challenge and a leadership development program that could help get them there. Leaders had been talking about specific concepts for several years, and they now saw the opportunity to actually put them into practice.

When O'Brien's team, whom he describes as a creative group always willing to try new things, discussed what would be required, they agreed they wanted a leadership development program with these three components:

- a competency-based model
- a research-based, valid and reliable 360-degree feedback instrument
- a systematic approach to leadership development

THE SOLUTION

A consultant working with O'Brien had been impressed by Zenger Folkman's Extraordinary Leader™ approach. She talked with her other clients about the programs they were using and came back to O'Brien with several options, but continued to recommend Extraordinary Leader.

It met their three criteria and further appealed to O'Brien, and later to the medical center's executives, because of "the research behind the product," he says. The program relies on decades of research and over 200,000 detailed statistical profiles from more than 25,000 managers in a wide range of companies and industries. The course is based on the book, *The Extraordinary Leader: Turning Good Managers into Great Leaders* by Dr. Jack Zenger and Dr. Joe Folkman.

O'Brien and others in his group went through the Extraordinary Leader workshop. Experiencing it firsthand clinched their decision.

UW Medical Center's first Extraordinary Leader workshops took place in the fall of 2005. Participants included the top eight executive leaders in the organization—the CEO, CFO,

The Problem

- Highly ranked University of Washington Medical Center sought to achieve even better results and needed improved leadership to make this happen.

The Solution

- Chose Zenger Folkman's Extraordinary Leader™ because of its basis in solid research, competency-based model and 360-degree feedback component.

The Results

- CEO and other top executives hailed the program after participating in the launch; now about a third of the center's leaders have participated in one of the sessions offered four times annually.
- Ninety-seven percent of the workshop participants have agreed—with 80 percent strongly agreeing—that it is effective at developing their leadership skills.

ABOUT UVMC

The University of Washington Medical Center is a nationally renowned hospital. It is one of the teaching hospitals affiliated with the University of Washington School of Medicine.

and others—and the next level of senior leadership, about 50 people in all.

After achieving leadership buy-in, the program is now offered four times annually. Employees attend from all parts of the medical center, including food services, environmental services, patient care, nurse administration, and physicians in leadership roles.

O'Brien, who is a certified Extraordinary Leader trainer, and his team have developed their own delivery schedule of the material. They begin with a two-and-a-half hour session that introduces leaders to the Extraordinary Leader concepts, and makes the case for using 360-degree feedback to improve leadership skill, and prepares them for participating in the process. Facilitators take care to emphasize that the primary focus is to build on their strengths as reported by the feedback. Three weeks later the participants gather again to interpret their feedback, meet with a professional coach, and create a development plan. Feedback reports are emailed to each participant two days prior to this second workshop, which, according to O'Brien "gives people the chance to have their reaction, get two nights' sleep on it, and then come to the workshop a little more prepared to start talking about their feedback and understand what it all means."

THE RESULTS

Extraordinary Leader is now embedded in the learning culture of the UW Medical Center.

"It has been received extremely well," O'Brien says. "Leaders give us very positive feedback about their experience."

The program's reputation for success has led to its adoption by other units of the

broader University of Washington, such as its office of financial management.

O'Brien cites the experience of the medical center's former CEO at the time Extraordinary Leader was rolled out as representative of the course's effect on its participants.

"She was anxious and a little bit reticent about doing a 360-degree program because she had had a bad experience in a previous organization," he says. "But she liked what she heard about Zenger Folkman and agreed to give it a shot. She went through it and thought it was great. She really enjoyed the experience and the focus. That was a good test for the program."

More than a third of the organization's leaders have completed the workshop. Ninety-seven percent of the workshop participants agreed—with 80 percent strongly agreeing—that "The design of this course (teaching methods, activities, materials) provided an effective way for me to learn this subject matter." Similar percentages also agreed that the facilitators are effective at delivering the material.

In response to open-ended evaluation questions, participants often cite the results of their 360-degree feedback as eye opening. Most are pleasantly surprised, such as the individual who wrote, "I didn't realize my team thought so highly of me." Others were candid about learning that their performance as perceived by others didn't match their own impressions. Raters also hailed the emphasis on building strengths.

"People remember the fact that it is really trying to get them to focus on building on a strength instead of focusing on a weakness," O'Brien says. "This focus also translates

into how they lead their own departments and teams, in terms of not just looking at problem areas, but also looking at successes and building on those."

"For me personally, it is extremely gratifying to know that we have a tool here that helps our leaders learn about themselves and how others perceive them, and provides them with the opportunity to look at developing their skills in new ways," O'Brien says. "Overall, this effort is contributing to improving the entire organization."

The program's success has elicited phone calls from training and learning officers at other healthcare organizations to discover what is working so well. O'Brien tells them, "If you are looking to use a multi-rater approach to help develop your leaders, then you should seriously consider the Extraordinary Leader program. We choose to use it here because it is competency based and has strong research behind it. The fact that it is a strength-based assessment helps change people's perspectives and mental models, and they end up having a more positive experience."

The Extraordinary Leader course is now a core component of the University of Washington Medical Center's training regimen. "It takes vision to institute a program like this, and a lot of credit has to go to Cheryl Hawley, our former manager, for seeing what was possible. I expect it to be part of the medical center's training program for a long time to come," says O'Brien, who is now exploring how to sustain the learning among those who have already completed the program. In looking forward, he cites a familiar refrain for the always-improving medical center: "Now our effort is focused on taking it to the next level. That is our next challenge."

The Extraordinary Leader™ approach focuses on the ability—in fact, the necessity—for individuals to hone their leadership competencies in key areas, and organizations to develop great leaders in these areas. It provides research-based strategies for strengthening leadership, both in individuals and in organizations, and delivers today's most sensible and flexible leadership development program.