**2019 ATDKC Excellence in Practice Awards**

**Category: Integrated Talent Management**

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| **JE Dunn’s Leadership 300** |
| **Challenge:**  |
| JE Dunn relies on its leaders to guide teams of construction professionals to provide superior service to its customers by being a valued business partner. Throughout its history, JE Dunn relied on people learning how to become leaders by watching and learning from their direct leaders. This worked well when the leaders were modeling good behaviors, but not so well when people reported to leaders who did not embody good leadership characteristics. Because of the tremendous growth the company achieved, we realized it was time for a well thought out leadership model and learning program. We anticipated the outcome would be an increased pipeline of leaders that understood and embodied the leadership behaviors that we determined would make JE Dunn the most successful. We knew, based on tons of research, that with great leaders our employees would be more engaged, more productive and would want to stay at JE Dunn. Our project objective was to identify emerging leaders and help them learn behaviors that would make them most successful in leading high performing teams. |
| **Action:**  |
| Relying on company executives from all parts of the organization, we led a competency selection process to determine those competencies that described superior performance of mid-level managers. Now referred to as our Talent Framework (attached), this guided our course design process. Our Talent Framework is now used in all aspects of how we relate to people in hiring, learning, engaging and performance management. A great deal of research to determine best practices in leadership development programs also guided the development of the course, Leadership 300. For example, we rely on a leader as teacher model and top company leaders host each session in partnership with a Learning and Development leader to co-facilitate the course. The learning experience of Leadership 300 is comprised of four three-day highly interactive sessions spread over nine months, each held in a different region to expose the participants to all parts of the company. As Leadership 300 developed, several sections emerged as most impactful to the participants. One of the most impactful is “Thoughts on Leadership” where each hosting executive openly shares about their leadership journey. This talk is placed at the beginning of the session and the executive openly shares his successes and failures and the leadership learnings gained from them. The vulnerability exhibited by the executive helps the participants be more willing to be open and share honestly and completely about their own experiences. This is especially important as the participants are asked to take a 360 degree assessment at the first session. This can be inherently stressful, however when executives share their experiences about their first 360, it seems to calm nerves and the results are viewed as opportunities rather than threats. Another part of the course asks the participants to commit to one behavior change they will make to improve their leadership based on the learning they gained from that session. During the following session, the participant shares with the rest of the participants and facilitators about their progress in changing the desired behavior that they committed to. In addition to holding participants accountable, the open peer to peer learning creates a close bond among participants. Equally important to the learning at each Leadership 300 session is the relationship building between the participants. Increasing the internal network of participants is a key component to the success of this course. Each region hosts a “Welcome Dinner” where participants socialize with fellow classmates as well as executives and past Leadership 300 participants from that region. Participants also attend teambuilding events that include a fun activity and social time together. Not only does this benefit the participant, the company benefits by the increased knowledge sharing afforded by the new and cemented relationships. Participants increasingly report that they are relying on their classmates to help resolve an issue on a project or with a client. We evaluate each of the sessions by using daily plus/delta check-ins and do an in-depth anonymous participant survey after each session that measures key success metrics and asks for improvement ideas. The results from the evaluations are used to improve the learning experience for the participants. The key success metrics are:• I gained new insights and understanding of leadership from this session• I will apply the knowledge gained to help me be a better leader• The learning I gained from this session will improve my job performance• This session was a worthwhile investment in my career development |
| **Result:**  |
| The participants of this course regularly report they feel more valued because of the investment the company made in them. Their self-awareness is deepened by understanding how they are viewed by their boss, peers and direct reports through the 360 assessment. The exposure they get to leadership behaviors that will assist them in their careers (and in life), is very beneficial to them. These are just a few main themes we see relayed through the evaluations. 100% of the participants regularly report they Strongly Agree or Agree with the statements of key success metrics mentioned above with the majority of responses falling into the Strongly Agree category. Our objective of identifying emerging leaders and helping them learn leadership behaviors to make them and the company more successful has exceeded our initial expectations. Many of the emerging leaders that attend Leadership 300 are then selected to attend our most prestigious senior leadership course that is led by our CEO and limited to 20 people. To be selected to this course (Senior Leadership Development), one must have achieved junior officer level and be assessed as having the potential to reach the C-suite level. It is clear that Leadership 300 has prepared its participants well to be promoted to higher levels within the company and exhibit leadership behaviors that lead to their success. The biggest lesson learned is that nothing can replace the active involvement of our executive leaders. Their willingness to participate and follow the recommendations of Learning and Development best practices has proven to be a highly successful formula. The variety of executives that participate is also important as various experiences allow the participants to see different styles of leadership. Also, the commitment from the participants to attend each session (they are asked to commit to all four sessions as a requirement for selection) cannot be underestimated. They are diligent in completing their pre-work and participating during the in-person sessions. This course has been a pure joy to design, develop and deliver. The participants and executives are eager to learn from one another and improve their leadership. The degree of servant leadership exhibited throughout this course is amazing. We are proud of all of our leaders and the willingness they show to assist and mentor others. |