

Case Study: A Winning Strategy

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Over the last two decades, team coaching has emerged as an extension of Executive Coaching, empowering leaders to work with their teams in new ways and transform team-building into culture-building. Since 2012, the field sales force for Sanofi's North American Pharmaceutical division has been reaping the benefits of team coaching delivered via The Pyramid Resource Group's proprietary model, Team Advantage™: The Complete Coaching Process for Team Transformation.

A Challenging Climate

In late 2011, North American Pharmaceuticals, Sanofi employed 5,000 people and was generating annual revenue of roughly \$10 billion USD. Anne Whitaker had just been named the division's president at a time when the organization as a whole faced great challenges. Some of Sanofi's best-selling drugs were just months away from going off patent, while other products faced stiff generic competition. Employees were weary from recent mergers, ongoing restructuring, and attempts to integrate cultures and processes while the company implemented necessary but painful cost-containment measures. Their anxiety was quantified by a disheartening employee engagement index of 61.6 percent.

Although Anne was concerned about market share and profit, she also recognized that sustainable improvement and innovation starts with employees who find meaning and satisfaction in their jobs and take pride in their company. She brought in The Pyramid Resource Group to coach a select cadre of first-line leaders tasked with seeding change leadership capabilities and coaching teams as Sanofi prepared to shift to a more patient-focused sales model.

Accelerating Change

Pyramid's Team Advantage™ model is a 16-week process that fast-tracks team cohesiveness and performance by asking members to create a game plan worthy of their time and energy. It has the built-in measures of a game with business goal attainment and encourages creativity and play.

Over the course of the first four months, a team of 14 professional coaches from Pyramid provided extensive training in change leadership and team coaching to 25 first-line leaders during rigorous, weeklong sessions. These change agents had an average tenure of 10 years and were recruited for a two-year special assignment: to build an internal-to-Sanofi capability for change leadership, team

coaching and continuous improvement. The driver for embedding these capabilities centered on the ICF Core Competencies, so the mentoring and partnership with Sanofi's change agents were the most important aspects of this rollout. Any good facilitator can complete a team-building event, but the team coaching that takes place after the goals are in place requires advanced coaching skills—especially listening for the team's voice. Professional coaches know what to label in the team dynamics, how to raise awareness around emotional intelligence and self-awareness for each individual within the context of their team, and—very importantly—how to detach from outcomes, recognizing that it is the team's game and they need to take ownership of all results, including the breakdowns and things that don't work, so the team finds new ways of working. The coach is there to coach and to label the many unspoken fears and concerns—we often call “elephants”—that people tend to avoid recognizing and discussing. The coach also needs to celebrate shifts, movement and successes so the team members feel momentum and learn to acknowledge one another. And not to be forgotten is lightness in coaching—keeping the action in place and members moving whenever there is a truth that makes the team uncomfortable.

The teams selected for the initiative were classified into three categories:

- High-performing, but needing a stretch.
- Supervised by a new team leader.
- Middle-of-the-pack, but with potential to grow quickly.

These teams established team charters, set extraordinary but tangible business goals, experienced professional coaching to address team dynamics and gain tools for working through breakdowns, and learned to celebrate daily successes. Pyramid's professional coaches also partnered with the change agents to conduct 60 Team Advantage™ games throughout the enterprise. These games directly impacted an estimated 25 percent of the field force and indirectly influenced many more as energized teammates spread the word about the shifts they were making. The coaching initiative helped employees build the skills to more effectively solve problems, work toward goals as part of a team, and communicate and collaborate across work groups and departments. With new confidence and in a spirit of play, employees learned to identify processes that needed to be simplified, revised or repurposed and take ownership of making the changes. This experience, combined with the process changes and new-leader visibility, accelerated change by equipping multiple teams with the skills needed to achieve their aggressive business goals. Individual participants modeled the competencies that were foundational to

build each team leader's coaching skills through the experience. This layering of experiential learning created traction around the desired organizational changes, which were confirmed by comparing the results of two surveys, one conducted prior to the initiative and the second conducted after one year.

Engaging Excellence

Sanofi contracted the research, analysis and communications firm HAYSMAR, Inc., to develop and deliver organization-wide surveys of employee engagement before and after the launch of the coaching initiative. The results showed that significant improvements in company culture and competencies were universal. The overall engagement index climbed from 61.6 percent in 2012 to 90.4 percent in 2013, with every work group included in the survey reporting increased engagement.

Six competencies were identified and measured in both surveys:

- Self-awareness
- Communicate
- Commit to Customers
- Cooperate Transversely
- Act for Change
- Strive for Results

The scores for all six behaviors increased, and five of the six showed statistically positive improvement. The greatest improvement in a single question demonstrated that employees' perception of leadership and an environment of openness and trust jumped from 43.9 to 87 percent, an increase of more than 43 percentage points. Meanwhile, tenor-of-survey comments showed substantial improvement. In 2012, only 14 out of 1,660 written comments were positive (0.8 percent), compared to 545 out of 966 comments (56.4 percent) the following year.

Improved positive scores in specific questions further reflected employees' newfound sense of personal accountability, expanded confidence in adverse situations, greater awareness of daily performance and strengthened emphasis on collaboration.

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Author Bio: DJ Mitsch is an ICF Master Certified Coach and past president of ICF Global. She is a thought leader in the coaching profession, an award-winning author, one of the first 25 coaches to receive ICF's Master Certified Coach designation and an experienced Mentor Coach. Prior to entering the coaching profession, she spent two decades as a broadcast executive.

In 1994, DJ and her husband, Barry Mitsch, co-founded The Pyramid Resource Group, which provides coaching to many of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies, medical nonprofits and health insurance companies, as well as telecommunications, aerospace, broadcasting and professional sports organizations. In 2013, DJ launched the Health Care Coaching Institute to serve the growing need for coaches well-equipped to serve leaders in the health care industry. She is the author of *Team Advantage: The Complete Coaching Guide for Team Transformation* (Pfeiffer/Wiley 2010) and the editor of *Coaching for Extraordinary Results*, part of the *In Action* series edited by Jack J. Phillips (American Society for Training and Development Press, 2002).