

Leadership Development

Make it the centerpiece of your talent strategy.



by Steve Arneson and Dave DeFilippo

ON WALL STREET, IT IS OFTEN SAID that your most important assets ride up and down the elevators daily. It's important to have top-tier leadership talent, which is why most firms try to identify and develop emerging leaders. BNY Mellon Asset Management recently embarked on a journey to build a world-class talent strategy, and the first step was to launch a *Leadership Development Program (LDP)*.

The LDP has long been the flagship offering in the talent management portfolio. Of all the efforts to develop talent, the LDP often gets the most attention from senior leaders, sparks the most excitement among participants, and provides the most visible platform for developing emerging leaders. For these reasons, we decided to make a leadership program the first plank in the talent platform.

What compelled us to make an emerging leader program the centerpiece of the new talent strategy? First, since the company is comprised of autonomous investment firms, we needed to send a clear message that the organization was serious about leadership development. Second, asking each firm to nominate a rising star would get attention, and make this a company-wide effort. Third, bringing emerging leaders together would best facilitate networking and best practice sharing—two goals of the talent strategy. Finally, this was the best way for senior leaders to view the top talent.

Early in the design process, we identified three questions to guide the program design: 1) how do we link LD to real business issues? 2) how do we create a world-class experience for participants? 3) how do we make the program worthwhile for the company? Given that this was the initial piece of the larger talent strategy, we knew we had to create a “wow” response; the LDP needed to be a big hit to move the talent strategy forward.

The good news is that we succeeded. The first LDP was launched in 2008 to much fanfare and lived up to its billing; participants and senior leaders raved about the experience. The 2009 program received similar reviews, whetting the appetite for more development programs and talent processes, and paved the way for a broader talent agenda.

Incorporate Five Key Lessons

Here are five key lessons that we learned along the way:

1. Go high touch all the way. When launching the LDP, get out there and “sell it.” Go to staff meetings and present the idea to senior teams. Meet with potential participants to get ideas about the program experience. Set up meetings with leaders, and ask them to be a “leader as teacher” at one mod-



ule. You need to be an evangelist for leadership development. Make it a priority to *build excitement* for the program.

Another way to go “high touch” is to incorporate networking tactics that fit your culture. In our case, with a dispersed organization, we asked each executive around the world to host luncheons with local program participants during the early phases of the LDP in order to share their career development experiences and meet these future leaders. This helped break down silos and build buzz for the program.

2. Involve the participant's direct managers. In addition to frequent contact with participants, establish regular contact with their managers to ensure involvement and commitment. For example, hosting regular 30-minute conference calls during the program creates a regular dialogue with managers and enables you to share what participants are learning. This helps managers reinforce and support continued develop-

ment. During our LDP, we hosted four teleconferences with direct managers to review the learning concepts, discuss upcoming milestones, and answer any questions about the experience. Get the managers involved in the program; these are the people that your participants return to after the program. You need their support.

3. Engage senior leaders as teachers. To knit the company together, you need to get senior leaders into the classroom as teachers or presenters. Emerging leaders want to spend time with senior managers; they want to pick their brains, challenge them on key issues, and build relationships. Ensure your senior leaders are well organized and prepared. If you don't get involved in helping them prepare for their sessions, you may not always get a quality experience. Insist that senior leaders prep for their sessions.

4. Keep the content relevant. This is a challenge, since much leadership content has to do with building generic skills. But it's necessary for making the program viable and plausible; participants will be more engaged if they can relate what they're learning to current events. We conducted the first program just as the financial meltdown was happening in September 2008. We adapted our discussions to what was happening, and how it would affect the company. The participants appreciated the effort to connect the content to real events that would impact them when they returned to their jobs.

5. Make it personal. As the leadership guru, you need to stay close to the leadership program—attending and orchestrating each session and perhaps teaching some content. Develop strong relationships with the leaders who will be your partners in driving the talent strategy in the future. Establish a personal connection with the participants and get involved in their development. We got to know each participant, thus gaining a unique view of their strengths and enabling us to add a grounded opinion when top talent is discussed.

Building an integrated talent strategy takes time, resources, and management support. Consider launching a LDP as the *first step*, and make the LDP the cornerstone of your talent management strategy. It's a case of a *push* that becomes a *pull* if the LDP is designed and implemented effectively. LE

Steve Arneson is president of Arneson Leadership Consulting www.arnesonleadership.com. Dave DeFilippo is VP of Learning and OD at BNY Mellon Asset Management. Email david.defilippo@bnymellon.com.

ACTION: Build a successful leadership program.