Gilbane Builds Leaders from the Ground Up

“These superintendents with the hard hats and the big steel-toed boots used to say, ‘I have a hard time giving someone feedback.’ Now they can do it.”

– Nancy Libardoni, Vice President of Enterprise Learning and Development, Gilbane

Gilbane, Inc., headquartered in Providence, R.I., is one of the largest private, family-owned construction and real-estate development firms in the industry. It is also one of the oldest—Gilbane was founded in 1873, and members of the fourth, fifth, and sixth generations of the family play an active role in the company. With more than 50 offices around the world, Gilbane develops and builds a wide range of facilities, from military bases to schools, hospitals, and casinos.

Several years ago, Gilbane’s senior leadership realized they were going to have trouble replacing the seasoned leaders who were nearing retirement age. Nancy Libardoni, vice president of enterprise learning and development, says that while Gilbane’s rising leaders typically excelled at the technical aspects of construction and real estate development, many lacked critical soft skills, particularly in the areas of coaching and developing others.

As many as one-third of Gilbane’s 2,600 employees are in leadership roles—mostly project managers and civil engineers—or on the path to leadership. But in order to build a robust leadership pipeline Gilbane recognized that those leaders needed to build leadership capability to be more effective in developing their people and realizing their own potential in future leadership roles.

“What people realized,” says Libardoni, “was that there was a lot of work to be done to make sure we had the talent equal to the talent going out the door.”

First a Strong Foundation, Then the Building Blocks

Working with DDI, Libardoni and her team created a full-fledged leadership development program for Gilbane University, the organization’s training and development arm. The program was built around a leadership competency model that Libardoni had put together with input from senior managers and others. To assess how strong managers were in those competencies, and which kinds of leadership-development courses they needed, the learning and development team drew on resources such as Leadership Mirror®, DDI’s 360-degree assessment tool.

Gilbane’s leadership development program has four levels, three for current leaders, and one for individual contributors who are expected to move into leadership roles. Participants complete a curriculum of half-day courses from DDI Interaction Management® leadership development system. These courses include Communicating for Leadership Success, Building and Sustaining Trust, Delegating with Purpose, and Influential Leadership.
Another *Interaction Management*® course, Fostering Innovation, was expanded to a full day because of the issue's importance to Gilbane, says Libardoni. “It’s part of our big innovation push—how to do things more effectively in the field, such as with pre-fab construction materials.” The course, she says, features “real teams working on real problems, with follow-ups. It’s been wildly successful, and out if it has come some very exciting, innovative ideas.”

In addition to those core courses, Gilbane has begun offering a 16-month program called Starting Line for New Managers. The program targets individual contributors who have recently been promoted into management. These new managers become part of a virtual community, and take courses developed both by DDI and by Gilbane University.

The multilevel program is delivered by eight HR business partners who are DDI-certified facilitators, as well as by Libardoni and a member of her team. The facilitators conduct the courses in-person at Gilbane’s 28 U.S. offices, and virtually for those learners in non-U.S. locations. Libardoni says most of the managers abroad are ex-pats, and have embraced the virtual environment because “they want to connect with other project managers around the world.”

Participants in the programs return for a 60-day follow-up and debrief. And the trainers and facilitators follow-up with a monthly roundtable with Gilbane’s DDI consultant. “We share best practices, talk about what’s worked, where we got stuck, whether it’s made a difference in the organization,” she says. “We love that we do this once a month.”

### Solution

- *Interaction Management*®
- **Leadership Mirror**®

### Results

Partnering with DDI to develop more than 700 leaders at multiple levels, Gilbane has realized the following results:

- 89 percent of participants were rated by observers as effective leaders following the training, compared to 78 percent before the training began.
- As a direct result of the program, employee productivity in work groups jumped more than 50 percent—as did morale and engagement, collaboration among employees, and open communication between employees and their managers.
- 90 percent of direct reports said that managers who went through the program increased their engagement, made them feel more valued as employees, and increased the likelihood they’ll stay at Gilbane.
- Nearly 90 percent of participants said the program has made them better leaders.