

Epworth HealthCare Grows a Ready Supply of Leaders



"If you're serious about high-quality patient care, you've got to invest in your leaders."

Alan Kinkade, Group CEO, Epworth HealthCare

Epworth HealthCare needed to respond to growth—growth in the demand for health services (especially in the private sector), in its service area (particularly among the elderly population), and from within (notably site expansions and new service offerings). To remain an industry leader and deliver on its growth-related strategic priorities, the Victorian health care group had to find top talent to fill its senior positions. A ready supply of leaders within the business were not apparent, and the organisation could not rely solely on the market for this talent.

"We are in the service industry so our people are very important to us. They're the people that deliver the great care to our patients.... It's the leaders who actually provide the leadership, accountability, the development of their people to deliver the great care we desire," says Alan Kinkade, Epworth's Group CEO. "We wanted not only to recruit the best talent, but also to grow the best—to fill our senior roles."

A Holistic Approach

To strengthen its leadership capability, Epworth HealthCare designed a talent strategy to identify leadership potential, accelerate the development of those identified, and ready these leaders for critical executive positions.

Key stakeholder engagement was essential and present at every stage of the program. Executives from each division nominated candidates for the high-potential pool. A newly formed Talent Committee then qualified and evaluated individual potential using DDI's Talent Factors.

"We wanted to engage key executives in the process so they had ownership of the program," says Kinkade. "And, we carefully considered candidates using an evidence-based, objective process—one that was tightly linked to the guiding behaviours and values of our organisation."

The DDI Solution

A multi-step strategy included:

- + Identification of leadership potential using DDI's talent factors.
- + Assessment via a day-in-the-life executive simulation.
- + Development with IDP, Interaction Management®: Exceptional Leaders (IM: ExLSM) and Business Impact Leadership® curriculum.

Results

Working with DDI to build a comprehensive talent framework for its high-potential executives, Epworth achieved the following results:

- + All participants have been promoted or have had the opportunity to act in stretch roles.
- + 100 percent agreed that they are more confident, motivated and effective when applying new leadership skills.
- + Talent is viewed and supported anew within the organisation.

To target development efforts, talent pool members' capabilities were assessed in a "day-in-the-life" executive simulation designed to replicate real-world work situations. "It was a pressure cooker, a great experience for leaders to go through," Kinkade says. "We learned a lot about individual and group development needs."

Each talent pool member also had an Individual Development Plan (IDP) to ensure a personalised development experience. It was tailored to his or her specific strengths and development gaps, and offered individual coaching and on-the-job application opportunities. The IDPs created structure, support, learning tension and accountability for talent pool and their managers. They also served as key measures to benchmark the program's success.

From the assessment results, a number of key themes emerged that were addressed through cohort development. This approach included formal classroom learning (using DDI's Interaction Management® and Business Impact Leadership® curriculum), group coaching, and a learning centre simulation. The learning focused on specific skills to drive growth, foster innovation, and promote quality patient care and employee engagement.

A Ready Supply of Leaders

A year after the launch of the talent initiative, engagement surveys show (much) higher ratings for leadership quality. What's more, all of the talent pool members have either been promoted or have had the opportunity to act in stretch roles—some within different divisions.

"Recently, we've had a couple of executive roles become available. We advertised widely, got great fields of talent externally and internally. The great success for me about this program was that our internal candidates shone through and were successful in these positions," says Kinkade. "It was a great cultural change for the organisation."

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