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Client Story

Accelerating Culture Change Through SLII®

Based in Indianapolis, Indiana, pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly and Company has a global presence with more than 33,000 employees in 120 countries. Given the company’s three core values of *integrity, excellence* and *respect for people* and its purpose of *uniting caring with discovery to create medicines that make life better for people around the world*, it’s no wonder Lilly’s founder, Colonel Eli Lilly, charged future employees to “Take what you find here and make it better and better.”

As the pace of change in the pharmaceutical industry accelerates, Lilly has sharpened its culture by focusing on *productivity, innovation, speed, and inclusion*. “We knew that from a leadership development perspective, we had an opportunity to support this culture change,” says Jim Bishop, director oncology learning development, communications, and coaching capabilities. “We had been training SLII® for 15 years and were very efficient at getting people through the program. We trained 7,000 people in SLII® to help them transition either from individual contributor to supervisor or from supervisor to manager.”

“We needed to make sure SLII® skills were embedded into the everyday actions of our people to drive the culture shift that was needed,” explains Karyn O’Donnell, consultant, global leadership development.



Jim Bishop



Karyn O’Donnell

Blanchard® had just redesigned and updated SLII®, which gave Bishop and O'Donnell the chance to make changes to Lilly's leadership development program. "Because of the new design, we were able to offer the training in a one-day session. This provided a solution for people who thought staff couldn't be out of their jobs longer than that," said Bishop.

The program was required for new supervisors, which meant classes were filled with two kinds of participants: those who were eager to be there because they were in new positions and wanted to learn new skills, and those who attended because it was required. Meeting the needs of both categories of learners created challenges—but the new design of the program eased that pain.

Bishop and O'Donnell started their quest by working with leaders who wanted to bring SLII® training to their teams. Because they were using the new program design, it was necessary to have the trainers recertified. "The new content gave us the opportunity to build a faculty that really wanted to be part of the culture change. We didn't want people who were simply willing to stand up in front of a class and deliver content. We wanted people who were committed to making the content come alive and connecting it to the larger corporate strategy of helping leaders deliver on our purpose," says O'Donnell. Business leaders who already were using SLII® were tapped to be certified facilitators. This allowed these engaged leaders to help embed SLII® skills while showing how important the training was to the organization's future. "It became an initiative that wasn't owned solely by L&D—business leaders from several divisions were embracing it," explains O'Donnell. Training intact work teams was the fuel the L&D team needed to drive training throughout the organization.



Linking SLII®, Coaching, and Self Leadership

Coaching was already an approach being used at Lilly, so linking it to SLII® was a natural fit. "Our coaching behaviors are to set the bar high; to ask, learn, and listen; to flex our approach; and to give and earn trust. The skills of SLII® mesh perfectly with the coaching behaviors. Setting the bar high is about the first skill of SLII®—goal setting. Asking, learning, and listening ties directly to diagnosing. And flexing our approach to give and earn trust is what matching is all about. Leaders are able to deliver results by putting it all together," explains O'Donnell.

As leaders and managers were trained in SLII®, individual contributors were trained in Self Leadership, a program that teaches direct reports how to have conversations with their leaders to clarify goals and take responsibility for their own development. When they use the same leadership language as their leaders, direct reports are able to ask for the proper amount of support and direction they need to accomplish their tasks. Entire work teams have the skills to work together efficiently when the language of SLII® is connected to coaching and everyone is trained with that approach.

Success with an Entire Business Unit

The strategic application of SLII®, Self Leadership, and coaching was taking hold throughout the Lilly organization when Bishop had the chance to impact a specific business unit. “When one of the top leaders in our Lilly Oncology team wanted to use the training, I knew this was a chance to make a huge positive impact. We started by giving him a comprehensive overview of SLII® so he could start using SLII® language with his direct reports. Three months into this journey, we trained his directors. They immediately realized why their leader was using SLII® and that it was working for them,” explains Bishop.

With the endorsement of the directors, all mid-level managers were trained in SLII® and the sales teams were trained in Self Leadership. Now everyone in Lilly’s oncology business unit can use the same leadership language to improve conversations, get their needs met, and drive the high performance of teams and individuals to secure their future. “This business unit cares deeply about making a meaningful difference for people with cancer and helping them live longer, healthier lives—and these new skills help the team move forward faster and more efficiently,” says Bishop.

Advice for Moving Forward

Bishop and O’Donnell learned a great deal during this journey and now offer suggestions for others planning an implementation.

“The first thing I want to stress is that SLII® is tested,” says Bishop. “Some people in the organization wanted to try a new leadership training program. Ultimately, we believed in the importance of using something that is tested and proven to be excellent. We didn’t want to choose a program because it was new; we wanted something that we could see working. SLII® gave us that.”

“The second piece of advice is to consider the why before the how. For years we focused on how to get the program to people, how to make the delivery more efficient, and how to improve learning. Now we focus on why we want people to learn in the first place,” says Bishop. The company knew that if people were being asked to innovate, include, accelerate, and deliver to support the new culture, we needed to focus on leadership and coaching skills. With better leaders and coaches, they get results and everyone wins. Once the why was determined, the how simply became a delivery option that best fit the need of the learner.

The third suggestion is to tie training to corporate strategy. Bishop warns to not assume that people automatically understand the links, and to be intentional about communicating the facts to them. “We explicitly stressed that building better leadership and coaching skills would help us keep employees engaged and drive better experiences for our customers, and better outcomes for the people who depend on our medicines.”

Finally, don’t get caught in the weeds. Deploying this kind of initiative can be a daunting task, but Bishop and O’Donnell agree that starting with one person who will become an evangelist for you is the key. “When you find the person who wants to support the training, work closely with them to help them succeed. The next thing you know, you have an entire team behind your efforts.”

Training is not a one-and-done thing, says Bishop. “It takes a continuous evolution of learning to create a common process that all employees can embrace.”

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