

Fierce Impacts Ernst & Young Culture Through Multi-Year Licensing Agreement

the company

Ernst & Young is a global leader in assurance, tax, transaction and advisory services, with headquarters in New York, NY and London, UK. The company is comprised of more than 135,000 people, who are considered the foundation of the company's success. Ernst & Young utilizes a multi-disciplinary team approach, drawing on its network of global professionals to work with clients collaboratively.

With offices throughout the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, the Far East and Asia Pacific, Ernst & Young generated revenues of US \$24.5 billion in 2008 and served 85% of the global Fortune 500 companies that same year. The company is passionate about helping its people achieve their potential, and believes that when their people achieve their best, so do their clients.

the challenge

As a professional services firm, Ernst & Young's key products are their people and their ability to build relationships with clients to drive results. As one of the Big Four audit firms, the company is a member of a small, high end class of businesses, and is known for its long-term relationships with its staff, partners and clients. Ernst & Young views people development as a critical initiative and the firm has been recognized by multiple organizations as an employer-of-choice in this regard (e.g. Training Magazine Hall of Fame, Fortune's Best Places to Work). EY is a training ground for future leaders. The company recruits from the top tier of college graduates; of that group, a few become a partner or principals while others pursue other opportunities after Ernst & Young—often in top leadership positions. EY has been recognized as one of the top 20 companies at producing CEOs.

Ernst & Young views the growth of their professionals as an investment in the company brand, as well as an investment in their people who will utilize these skills throughout their careers, wherever they go.

However, as the old adage goes, "a strength overused often becomes a weakness." EY, like many organizations that pride themselves on the strength of their relationships, had developed a culture that at times emphasized politeness over candor when dealing with individuals within the organization. Candid feedback, which is a

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MIKE HAMILTON
CHIEF LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT
OFFICER, AMERICAS

necessary component in developing others, was at times watered down or avoided entirely in an effort to preserve goodwill. But as issues persisted and pressure to perform increased, messages were often conveyed in a way that left both the sender and the receiver stressed.

“We were becoming very aware of the implications of superficial internal conversations,” says Jackie Bayer, Director of Organizational Development for Ernst & Young Americas. “The need for meaningful conversations was a key business issue; we needed to provide people with effective tools to have the conversations that need to happen so we could get things done and develop our people.”

the solution: fierce training

The relationship with Fierce began in 2005, when one of the partners within Ernst & Young read *Fierce Conversations* and invited Susan Scott to be a keynote speaker at a partner meeting. Bayer attended that meeting and was intrigued; in addition, enough people within the meeting found it interesting, so much so that the company made a commitment to pursue training.

Fierce training began with the partner population at three offices in the Pacific Northwest; the company then introduced the concepts to partners and senior managers. Positive feedback from these sessions led the company to broaden its commitment, with a multi-year licensing agreement that allows integration of Fierce concepts and models throughout the professional development courses that Ernst & Young offers. The company’s leadership felt that Fierce was the right choice to meet their cultural needs because it is fundamentally different from other methodologies. “Fierce provides discrete tools as well as a philosophy that addresses conversational effectiveness in a way that is practical and immediately actionable, yet long lasting,” said Bayer.

Adds Mike Hamilton, EY’s Chief Learning & Development Officer for the Americas, “We believe that Fierce should not be relegated to just a ‘training event’ that takes place once and potentially forgotten. Through the licensing agreement, we are creating a common language and methodology for having meaningful conversations in a variety of contexts.”

When Ernst & Young employees encounter Fierce concepts throughout various training offerings (even technical training), it drives the point home that having authentic conversations is critical to every relationship and aspect of their jobs, and helps them to change how they think about and approach conversations on a day-to-day basis. And since relationships are a cornerstone of Ernst & Young’s approach to working with clients, Fierce training also helps employees understand the direct link between conversations and results.

embedding fierce

With Fierce integrated into their training, Ernst & Young is providing its employees with a new mindset around having authentic, results-oriented conversations, and the practical skills to make them happen. “I had prided myself on having quality conversations before, but I found with Fierce training, I had acquired a model that provided a useful structure for a variety of situations. I feel more skilled than before,” comments Hamilton.

Hamilton is making Fierce training available to anyone in the firm because he feels that all employees need to leverage the conversations central to their success. “We think that embedding Fierce in our training will have a lasting effect. The real value is that Fierce provides a set of tools that everyone can use to have the conversations they need to have, and to demonstrate how invested they are in the relationship through those conversations,” Hamilton notes.

add fierce to your training toolkit

Our diverse, global client list underscores a basic truth: Business is fundamentally an extended conversation—with colleagues, customers and the unknown future emerging around us. Whether your focus is on implementing key initiatives, managing top talent, improving customer acquisition and retention, developing leaders, or simply igniting productive dialogue that generates clarity and impetus for change—success occurs one conversation at a time.

For more information about how Fierce can help your business, visit www.fierceinc.com or contact us at 425.283.1294.

fierce.

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