fierce case study



Fierce Strengthens Relationships at Washington Dental Service

Background

After watching Susan Scott deliver a powerful keynote presentation at a Leadership Conference in Seattle, senior executives from Washington Dental Service (WDS) decided “Fierce Conversations” might work well for their needs. Their goal was to build a more trusting, open, and honest organizational culture.

Challenges

As in most organizations, candor was a primary concern. Employees from all levels of the organization had slipped into the habit of playing it safe rather than addressing pertinent issues with courage and authenticity. Sometimes conversations were one-sided; participants were reluctant to offer differing perspectives or withheld conflicting ideas. Other times conversations that needed to take place weren’t taking place at all or were taking place at the wrong times.

“We had a few situations where people were viewing performance evaluations as confrontation conversations,” said Larry Marino, training specialist at WDS. “Rather than having daily conversations, building trust, and uncovering problems, issues weren’t being brought up until the big discussions. Of course that wasn’t positive for anyone.”

The next area of focus was accountability. Leaders were determined to strengthen leadership skills and grow future leaders by building autonomy and encouraging employees to fully own projects and take responsibility for results, rather than rewarding inaction or diluted decision-making processes.

Leaders knew they wanted to make changes at the organizational level; yet, there were several questions to address. With employees at multiple locations, how would all employees receive the same kick-off messages to build support and set the stage for change? How much time were they able to commit? How would they ensure the client experience remained seamless and was not impacted by training?

Solutions

Fierce partnered with WDS to tailor a program to meet their needs. Because time was an issue and leaders wanted to use both “Fierce Conversations” (2-day) and “Fierce Accountability” (1-day), the client development experts at Fierce worked with WDS to condense the two sessions into three 4-hour modules.

To kick off the training for all employees, Susan Scott led a keynote presentation. Employees in Seattle attended in person. Those located in different cities attended via video conferencing. The event introduced the principles, demonstrated leadership support, and ensured everyone was on the same page.

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Washington Dental Service, a member of the Delta Dental Plans Association, is the leading dental benefits company in the state of Washington, delivering over fifty years of high-quality, affordable dental care to more than two million people through employer-sponsored programs.

CHALLENGES

OVERALL
- Candor
- Trust
- Accountability

LOGISTICS
- Geographically Dispersed Workforce
- Coverage for Client-Facing Employees

SOLUTIONS

- Based Module Selection on Organizational Needs
- Fierce Conversations, Accountability, Negotiations, & Leadership
- Company-Wide Roll-Out Train the Trainer
- Reinforced Messages through Senior Leadership

WHAT CHANGED?

- Improved Morale
- Honest and Constructive Feedback
- Better Overall Communication Skills
- Increased Accountability



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>
> – Jim Dwyer, President & CEO
> Washington Dental Service

What Changed

Relationships at WDS are getting stronger every day. "The biggest change I've seen has been improved morale," said Jim Dwyer, President and CEO at Washington Dental Service. "And people have a higher comfort level when giving feedback and communicating in challenging situations. "

Larry Marino has noticed open, honest conversations taking place at the right times. "The thought process has changed," said Marino. "People are using the coaching model and mining for clarity on a day-to-day basis, instead of waiting for performance evaluations." Regular connections are building accountability and autonomy. "People are happier and more engaged because they are being included in conversations and being heard."

Moving forward

The goal for 2011 was to invest in training everyone in the organization. The goals for 2012 will be to ensure all new hires receive training, and to continually revisit materials and reinforce learning. WDS has no intention of letting the training become a flavor-of-the-month. They are committed to ensuring employees continue to build trust and have open, honest discussions on a daily basis.

Roll-Out Strategy

Kick-off Event
All employees (approximately 300) attended keynote presentation. (Employees in Seattle took part in person. Employees in Colville and Spokane participated via video conferencing.)

Training
All employees went through training around the same time. Because two major call centers were involved in two different cities, one group covered the phones while the other went through training.

Ongoing Plan
All new hires receive training. Messages are continually reinforced for previously trained employees.

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