

CASE STUDY

A. Schulman and Kent State University Partner on Frontline Leadership Training



Center for Corporate and Professional Development

BACKGROUND

As a leading employer in today's ever-changing global economy, A. Schulman has committed to the investment and the development of their associates. Nearly four years ago, A. Schulman successfully implemented a training initiative in Europe, and more recently in the APAC region, to further develop their frontline leaders. According to Andreas Guenther, Vice President of Global Human Resources Operations, the goal for the European program was to "develop candidates inside the company to strengthen the talent pipeline." This successful initiative inspired the team in North America to emulate similar training for the organization's high-potential leaders. For this program to be successful in North America, it was essential to incorporate topics similar to the competencies covered in the European training.

These topics included:

- Empowerment and Delegation
- Coaching and Developing Others
- Building Accountability
- Facilitating Change
- Financial Acumen
- Building a Successful Team
- Decision-making

THE CHALLENGE

When searching for a partner to develop a similar program for the North American team, Aimee Trusso, Human Resource Director for the United States and Canada (USCAN), was looking for a well-established and experienced partner who would be able to quickly understand A. Schulman's objectives and provide flexible, tailored content that was adaptable to the culture at A. Schulman. The region has grown organically, as well as through acquisition over the last several years. It was important for this program to be based on A. Schulman's values of "Open, Honest, Listen and Accountable" so that associates, who have worked at various companies prior to being acquired, could accelerate their understanding of the culture.

"It was imperative to ensure that recently promoted associates were set up for success. It is important for A. Schulman to provide this training because our leaders are extremely important in ensuring our associates truly feel a part of the organization and are fully engaged so they can drive our business every single day," says Trusso.

THE SOLUTION

A. Schulman professionals sought out talent development partners whom they had worked with in the past. The Center for Corporate and Professional Development at Kent State University was top of mind because of the positive relationship the company experienced with Kent State's project management training. A. Schulman leaders found that Kent State "was a true fit in all aspects of leadership topics that A. Schulman was looking for." They believed that Kent State would deliver comparable frontline leadership training, tailored to the strategic objectives, and cultural and operational settings of A. Schulman. According to Kim Whiteman, Chief Human Resource Officer and Executive Vice President, for this initiative to be successful, three objectives needed to be met, which included "the opportunity to build skills, invest in A. Schulman's people and to drive the culture forward."



ABOUT A. SCHULMAN

A. Schulman, Inc. is a leading international supplier of high-performance plastic compounds and resins. Since 1928, the Company has been providing innovative solutions to meet its customers' demanding requirements. The Company's customers span a wide range of markets such as packaging, mobility, building & construction, electronics & electrical, agriculture, personal care & hygiene, sports, leisure & home, custom services and others. The Company employs approximately 5,000 people and has 58 manufacturing facilities globally.

Learn more: www.aschulman.com

THE RESULTS

The Center for Corporate and Professional Development developed a customized Certificate in Frontline Leadership that met all of A. Schulman's objectives. To achieve this goal, Kent State's Certificate in Frontline Leadership provides participants with knowledge in the following critical areas:

- Effective Organizational Leadership
- Managing Transition and Embracing Change
- Motivating and Engaging Associates
- Effective Decision-making
- Financial Acumen
- Turning Conflict Into Collaboration
- Coaching
- Building a Successful Team

"Kent State's professional development programs cover all facets of leadership, which allowed A. Schulman to choose one partner rather than work with multiple organizations who were strong in only one specific topic area," stated Trusso.

In order to ensure a successful nomination process for associates to attend, national senior leaders and HR partners in various business units are asked to nominate associates that are relatively new to a leadership role and would benefit from this type of talent development. Ms. Trusso stated, "The individuals [in this first certificate program] showed strong technical aptitude and needed additional exposure to the leadership side of their new roles."

Since launching the North American program in September 2015, the program has received positive feedback from participants of the program, as well as their direct managers.

"For example, our managers are seeing a difference in these individuals being motivated, engaged and passionate about the tools they learned from the training, which in turn is infectious and spreads throughout the teams," states Trusso.

In addition, Guenther states, "The participants seem to be very energized. We have received a good amount of positive feedback from the participants' supervisors and peers who have observed changed behaviors and positive impact."

The Certificate in Frontline Leadership has provided a foundation for the A. Schulman team to enhance their skills and continues to provide positive impact throughout the organization.



“Three words that come to mind regarding our experience with Kent State are easy, inspiring and fun. Kent State provides a true partnership that understands A. Schulman's objectives and culture, which in turn resonates immensely amongst the facilitators.”

– Aimee Trusso
Human Resource Director for USCAN

“I felt the program offered the basis/ground work to allow for the use of proven tools in the decision making and implementation process.”

– Tim Langschwager
Research and Development Manager