

MYLEAD: IN-DEPTH, IMPACTFUL LEARNING FOR SENIOR LEADERS

Fenestra, Inc.

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MyLead is an interactive leadership development program that was developed in partnership between The Interpublic Group of Companies, Inc., one of the world's leading marketing communications services companies, and Fenestra, Inc. a division of Sandra Hartog & Associates, a leading talent management consulting firm



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The Business Challenge

MyLead is an interactive leadership development program that was developed in partnership between The Interpublic Group of Companies, Inc. Inc (NYSE: IPG), one of the world's leading marketing communications services companies, and Fenestra, Inc. a division of Sandra Hartog & Associates, a leading talent management consulting firm.

The goal of the MyLead program was to provide in-depth, impactful learning to individuals in mid to senior leadership roles whose responsibilities include staff leadership, significant client relationships, and business development accountabilities. The target population is dispersed throughout the globe and, as billable professional services staff, unable to take meaningful time away from client-directed activities.

The Solution

The solution to this problem was the creation of MyLead. The program brings together four critical elements to create a highly impactful leadership development experience:

1. the rigor of assessment center methodology
2. the power of executive coaching
3. the impact of learner directed content; and
4. the global reach and flexibility of web-based technology

Over seven weeks, MyLead participants alternate between 'simulation' and 'coaching' weeks:

- In simulation weeks, the participant plays the role of a leader in a fictitious, global organization and addresses challenges through
 - i. Telephone interactions with role players (portraying staff, clients or colleagues)
 - ii. E-mail and voicemail interactions
 - iii. Reports and other business documents
 - iv. Extensive role plays with his/her coach
- In coaching weeks, the participant has a debrief call with his/her coach based on the coach's assessment of the full range of work done by the participant in the simulation

The entire program is delivered via an on-line platform that allows for learner-directed access to content such as e-learning modules, development planning tools, self-assessment and journaling tools to help learners process their experiences.

A New Way of Thinking about Management Development Delivery

MyLead presents three unique and innovative advances in development.

First, relying on Honey and Mumford's concepts of learning styles, MyLead provides a learner with a variety of modalities to acquire skills. These modalities can be readily mixed and guided by a coach. They include 1) "learning by doing" through participation in a robust multipart assessment center-like simulation; 2) "learning through feedback" available throughout the seven weeks of the program; 3) "learning through concepts" via a variety of e-learning type presentations delivered through the development platform and 4) "learning through reflection" via journaling, development planning and the iterative nature of the simulation.

Second, providing a simulation via web-based technology combined with “high touch” components, i.e., role players and coaches, enables a geographically dispersed cohort of participants to be engaged in an extensive learning experience (30 hours over seven weeks) at their own personal time availabilities and with minimal costs.

Third, a unique “CRM” like system was developed to allow a bank of role players to assume the role of characters in the simulation and still maintain continuity of participant interactions over time and across a number of different role players. This deepened the realism of the simulation and helped the participants learn to grow and mature relationships as well as see the immediate effect of change in behavior.

Solving a Critical Business Issue

MyLead addresses critical issue of developing a common set of leadership standards across a highly diverse, decentralized, global organization.

Key complicating factors were the need to:

- promote the development of top talent across multiple business divisions and work disciplines
- cost-effectively deliver a high-touch development solution across multiple locations
- accommodate individual work schedules while providing a common experience
- provide an in-depth learning experience without sacrificing participant billable time
- be flexible enough to accommodate different skill levels and diverse development needs
- cooperatively engage business divisions who are competitive with each other in the marketplace.

The MyLead program was developed with a team of psychologists, an international team of IPG line executives representing all business divisions, and a cross-division team of IPG development professionals. By engaging these executives in the development of MyLead, a set of leadership standards emerged centered on people leadership, business leadership & profitability, and client leadership. MyLead became the focal point for introducing these standards into the organization and building the requisite leadership skills in these areas. The program contributes directly to organizational strategy because it focuses participants on challenges associated with growing the business, improving profitability, and managing people and clients.

Overcoming Internal Obstacles

The program can accommodate large numbers of participants and reach broadly into IPG’s 40,000 person organization, as it is easily scalable due to the virtual nature of the web-based platform and telephone interactions. MyLead ensures a high level of skill in IPG’s leadership standards which are critical to business results.

Developing a program to accommodate a wide spectrum of stakeholders presented many obstacles including:

- Developing new technology for MyLead participants and the program’s back office operators: The simulation platform for participants mirrors the interactivity of a real “computer desktop”. A unique “CRM” like system was developed to allow a bank of role-players to maintain continuity of participant interactions over time and different role-players
- Adapting to a new approach to development including both assessment and simulation components delivered unconventionally required ensuring internal buy-in. Hosting a series of

showcases allowed critical stakeholders to “trial” MyLead. These showcases were broadcast locally via webinars. An internal marketing campaign was launched worldwide targeting potential attendees (focused on the uniqueness and quality of the learning experience) and executives (focused on benefits and identifying appropriate participants)

- Funding development and ongoing program costs: This was addressed by having the corporate center fund development costs, and varying ongoing cost sharing arrangements by business division.
- Providing distributed learning in an organization that demands high touch: The use of the role player phone bank (50 hours of availability per session) and five to seven hours of telephone coaching with an executive coach added the necessary degree of high-touch to an online-delivered business development program.
- Achieving realism across a range of business types: IPG’s core business is creativity. The simulation was developed using a mix of IPG creative staff and Fenestra psychologists to ensure materials were vibrant, engaging, and suited for the learning goals.

The Global Deployment of Mylead

MyLead has been deployed globally across 11 of IPG’s agencies. In 13 months, we have had 334 participants in 20 countries. 56% of the participants have been based outside of the USA. 47% of the international participants have been from Europe, 25% from Asia, and 18% from Latin America and Canada.

MyLead has become a core part of the development curriculum in each of IPG’s major business divisions and was prominently featured in the development plans of mid and senior level executives in the 2008 succession management process.

Program administration is facilitated by the Fenestra platform. Participants can engage in the program 24 hours a day, seven days a week, from any computer with web access. If a participant chooses, they can spend a few hours on their office PC and resume their work from their home.

Using the administrative features of the Fenestra platform, participant engagement is monitored by measuring the use of different learning modalities. Participants have on average three to five role player interactions, one coach interaction, and 15 to 20 email interactions during each of the three simulation modules. Each participant who has completed the program has engaged in all five planned one-hour coaching sessions. Many have requested ongoing coaching engagements. All participants have accessed at least one of the self-directed development tools while the majority has accessed three or more. Program completion rates are approaching 80%. Those who drop out generally leave due to work demands, and many reschedule for a more opportune time.

Measurable Results that Mean Something

To determine the measurable results and quality of the MyLead program, we collect pre and post program data from participants. Before the program, we asked each participant to rate their skill level on the 12 targeted competencies and to identify the three strengths they would like to build upon. Immediately after the program, participants are also asked to respond to a series of questions about their experiences, satisfaction, and competency improvement.

Data from the post program reaction survey shows that the program is well received by the participants:

- 100% of participants agreed that the program is flexible, easy to use, and find value in their feedback calls with their coach
- 93% of participants agreed that MyLead will help them in their current role
- 93% of the participants would recommend the program to others.

Of the areas each participant targeted for development during the program:

- 100% of the participants reported improving in at least one of the leadership behavioral areas (people, client, and business leadership)
- 89% reported improving in at least two of those areas
- 73% reported improving in all 3 targeted areas.

Based on the successful results, positive feedback, and increasing enrollment, IPG will be expanding this program in 2009. Additionally, a similar program for lower level managers is being developed.