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Client Story

Measuring the Effectiveness of SLII® Training at Land O’ Lakes

Member-owned agricultural cooperative Land O’ Lakes’ crop inputs division, WinField United, develops products, services, and technology to meet the needs of nearly 1,000 locally owned and operated cooperative and independent agricultural retailers and their grower customers across the United States and Canada. A shift in strategy and a corporate reorganization drove the need for additional training for the company’s sales force. “We delivered the technical training our salespeople needed to know our products and services, but we also needed to teach them how to have productive conversations with their teams and their customers. As our customer needs changed, our salespeople needed more than product knowledge—they needed coaching on conducting effective business conversations,” explains Brian Lime, director, sales operations.

“The reorganization brought different groups together to form new teams, and we wanted to give them all a common language to use,” says Beth Eberhart, senior sales trainer. “SLII® from Blanchard® provided the foundational skills we wanted our people to use to improve communication. We also wanted to measure the results of the training but weren’t sure how to manage that process with our small staff. Our partnership with Blanchard allowed us to design the training and measure the results as well.”

Rolling out the Training

Land O' Lakes facilitators attended Training for Trainers certification to prepare for delivering the classes virtually. "We originally positioned the training as a one-day experience with pre-work to be completed as self-study prior to the class," says Eberhardt, "but the pre-work was so extensive we quickly changed the positioning to a two-day class. It was crucial for people to complete the pre-work before proceeding with the live virtual sessions, so we made sure they built that into their schedules."

Matthew Swartz and Richard Rowe, both field sales trainers, are two of the facilitators who delivered SLII® training to 250 people as part of the company's Center of Excellence program. "The virtual delivery went well because we had dual facilitators. It helped keep people engaged to hear from two different voices during the sessions. And we used a producer to manage breakouts so we could focus on the content," explains Swartz.

"It can be difficult to keep salespeople engaged in a training program, but we developed customized content so the learning applied to their everyday roles," says Rowe. "They were able to see how this could be a useful tool they could apply to client conversations to improve trust and communication."

Measuring Results:

Land O' Lakes and Blanchard® partnered with Dr. Paul Leone of MeasureUp Consulting* to determine the results of the SLII® training. Using a post-training survey that measured self-reported data from participants along with corroborating data from their bosses and direct reports, the 6-level measurement strategy was based on these questions:

- Did participants like the training?
- Did they learn anything?
- Did they change behaviors back on the job?
- Did the new behaviors make them more productive?
- Did the bottom-line impact exceed the cost of training?
- What climate factors help or hinder the long-term sustainability of the training?

Measuring Results, cont.

The first question measured the overall satisfaction of the learners. Level 1 scores showed that 94% of participants rated the training as good, very good, or outstanding. Additionally, 96% of participants thought the training provided them with valuable new knowledge and tools, 95% thought the program content was applicable to their work, and 94% would recommend the training program to others. The Level 2 evaluation question measured learning and was asked 90 days after the training occurred. After participants had a chance to use their new skills, 94% of participants saw value in the new knowledge.

Next, participants were asked if they had been able to apply six specific SLII® skills including goal setting, diagnosing, matching, directive leadership, supportive leadership, and one-on-one conversations. A full 91% of participants had applied new skills to some extent or to a great extent. "We also asked the direct reports of the participants if they noticed their leader using the new skills and 91% indicated they noticed improvement," says Eberhardt.





Isolated Performance Improvement?



44%

Average overall
performance
improvement



63%

Average number of
direct reports who
observed **significant** or
exceptional leader
improvements



82%

Average number of
direct reports who
say their leader's
improvements
increased their own
performance

=



23%

Average estimate of
improvement in
performance directly
attributable to training



"For Level 4 data, we asked participants and direct reports if they saw an improvement in the overall performance of their team," says Eberhardt. Some 78% of participants said the new leader behaviors improved the performance of their team, and they estimated that 38% of that improvement could be attributed to applying their new skills. Direct reports indicated that their leader's new skills helped their own performance improve by 82% overall. Specific results from the direct reports included:

- 87% improvement in communication with the leader
- 88% improvement in taking more initiative with work activities
- 87% improvement in analysis and problem-solving skills
- 88% improvement in adaptability and efficiency
- 90% improvement in teamwork within the group

These results proved not only that leaders saw an improvement in their ability to use SLII® skills to influence higher team performance, but also that individual team members recognized they were able to improve their own performance because of their leader's expanded skills.

Participants and direct reports were also asked about their level of engagement and commitment to the company 90 days after the training was received. Some 80% of participants and 82% of direct reports said they were more engaged, while 61% of participants and 72% of direct reports indicated they were more committed to staying at Land O' Lakes.

The next level of performance was calculated by multiplying the percentage of overall performance improvement by the average number of direct reports who observed improvement in their leader's behaviors, then multiplying that number by the average number of direct reports who said their leader's improvements increased their own performance. This determined the average improvement of performance per participant directly attributable to training, which came to 23%.

The goal was to be conservative with the data, so percentage numbers for this part of the measurement utilized the data scores that indicated significant improvement only.

The Level 6 evaluation looked at climate factors (elements of the organizational culture) that could maximize the ROI of training. This theory measured the impact on participants whose managers provided high support for their training versus those whose managers provided low support. Level 6 results showed that 50% of participants reported high involvement from their managers, 44% reported fair support, and only 6% reported low support. "The high level of manager support for the people going through the training has been an important factor of our success with this initiative," says Eberhardt.

Advice to Colleagues

While the team at Land O' Lakes continues to link SLII® language to other courses in their Center of Excellence curriculum, they offer tips for others.

"Be sure to communicate why you are doing the training so people will be able to understand how it will help them be more effective in their roles. Make sure you have buy-in from senior leaders. Above all, have a strategy in place to keep the learning alive," says Eberhardt.

"Focus on the new and different skills your people need to secure the future success of the organization. Use SLII® conversation skills with internal leaders to get their support for the training. Make sure they know you aren't delivering training to check a box, but to change behaviors," offers Lime.

"SLII® gives people a method to ask for more help in a way that doesn't make them look inadequate. It teaches people how to partner to reach goals. Everyone in an organization can benefit from these skills. The key is the level of commitment throughout the company. Our leaders made a commitment and that made the execution so much easier," says Swartz.

"Stay within the confines of the ideas you are teaching," adds Rowe. "Follow and trust the instructional design of the program. It is created the way it is for a reason: it works. So trust the process. Of all the courses I teach, this is the most impactful. It changes lives. It is all about building trusting relationships through effective communication."

**Dr. Paul Leone created the sixth level of measurement, which won the 2019 Brandon Hall Gold Award for best advance in measuring the impact of leadership training. Level 6 is described in his book *Measuring and Maximizing Training Impact*.*

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