



BlueCross BlueShield  
of South Carolina

## Extraordinary Leader™ Case Study



# Growth and Complexity Drive Demand for Better Leadership

## THE PROBLEM

With growth comes complexity. With complexity comes a need for better leaders. That was the situation facing the information systems division of BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina. The division handles back-office processing for the familiar insurance plan, but not just in South Carolina. It also has contracts to do processing for plans in other states, plus insurance plans for federal and state government employees, the military and commercial businesses. These wide-ranging responsibilities mean the information systems division is a *de facto* business-within-a-business with its own management environment and training demands.

That's why executives of the 2,000-employee division and their training and development team had established a summer institute for management training. The program was successful, but the training team noticed that as the organization grew, the program began to tilt ever so slightly toward leadership development.

"As we looked at the differences between management and leadership, we realized that we needed to make a distinction between the two," said Garcia Mills Tate, manager of information system capability programs. "We need individuals to understand leadership in its totality and that it is not just one component."

Tate and her team decided that leadership development was so crucial at this juncture in the organization that they

needed to break it out separately from their existing summer institute program.

They were in part motivated by management demographics showing what might be coming. The ages of intermediate and senior managers indicated that the next five years might see many retirements.

"Are we prepared from a succession planning standpoint, from a replacement standpoint, and are we really getting people in the pipeline that will be in a position to assume those responsibilities?" Mills Tate remembers the team asking themselves. "We were trying to be proactive from that standpoint."

To develop the leaders to handle their changing business environment and to replace those who might move on, Mills Tate and her team began a search for a partner to help them develop and deliver a new leadership-focused training element.

## THE SOLUTION

After reviewing vendor proposals, the BlueCross team was most impressed with Zenger Folkman. Mills Tate cites their reputation in the industry, experience with similar programs at other companies, and the research behind their training programs as reasons she gave them further consideration.

"We were also very excited about the 360-degree feedback component and the organization's approach to not only delivering the results of the feedback, but the methodology by which they would

## The Problem

- BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina's information systems division also does back-office processing for other BlueCross plans, plans that cover federal and state government employees, the military and commercial businesses. Recent growth spurred more leadership development.
- Management demographics indicate possible leadership turnover in coming years.

## The Solution

- BlueCross selected Zenger Folkman to help them build a leadership training program—the resulting summit includes the Extraordinary Leader™ and Extraordinary Coach™ workshops.

## The Results

- After two years of implementation, the number of coaching conversations held has significantly increased, and leaders are achieving greater success.

## ABOUT BCBSSC

BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina serves nearly a million South Carolinians. Largely due to the growth of government programs, BCBSSC has more than 12,000 employees and has offices throughout South Carolina, as well as in Virginia and Texas. BCBSSC has earned honors as a top employer for the state.

train our people to analyze those results and use them in their development plans," she said.

Because of the quantitative, analytical nature of the senior leaders of the information systems division, the research behind Zenger Folkman's program made an important impression.

Zenger Folkman trainers were willing to say "let me show you the hard data and the hard numbers that support my methodology and my approach," Mills Tate said. "That goes a long way with our CIO and his direct reports."

The BlueCross team selected Zenger Folkman to help develop what they went on to call their Effective Leadership Summit, which is now held each summer. It is targeted at a pool of about 100 total individuals who are viewed as thought leaders within the division, and it is centered around Zenger Folkman's Extraordinary Leader™ approach.

## THE RESULTS

The Effective Leadership Summit has been held for the past two years and is slated for another session in 2009.

"The reactions to the experience overall have been positive," said Mills Tate. "Everyone walks away with a deeper understanding of who they are, first and foremost, and also a better understanding of how to approach leadership within the organization."

The Zenger Folkman methodology includes an innovative approach to

delivering and interpreting 360-degree feedback she said, which can be difficult for some participants. Their first reaction upon seeing the results is often shock.

"But Zenger Folkman does an excellent job of helping them to become comfortable with the results and cautioning them about the common trap of looking at the weakest scores and starting there," Mills Tate said, referring to Zenger Folkman's emphasis on building strengths rather than fixing flaws.

She explained that before long, participants opened up and revealed that they didn't realize they struggled in one area and didn't appreciate that they were strong in another. "It is a real eye-opener for them."

The workshops have benefitted even those who don't have direct reports, Mills Tate said. Because of the nature of their work, design architects may not have staffs but they do influence and have approval authority over many projects within the organization. They now better understand their role as leaders, specifically how they can coach and mentor.

"We are starting to see people form those informal networks and bonds that we hoped we would," said Mills Tate. The class of 2007 took it upon themselves to continue to meet regularly to gauge their progress and encourage each other to follow what they'd learned in the workshops. One top executive, who self-proclaimed that he is "not a people-person," has begun his own personal mentoring program for individuals in his area.

Zenger Folkman has delivered on the three points most important to her and her team. When considering partners for leadership development, Mills Tate said: "They get strong points first for their knowledge of the industry. We are looking for the best and the brightest within the industry. Then we are looking for people that are willing to customize to our environment. And third, once you get here in front of our people, do you have the engaging personality that makes them want to learn more about the material? To have that trifecta means a lot to me as a program manager."

She and her team appreciate a simulation element that Zenger Folkman recommended that allows the participants to immediately apply what they have learned. That level of personal attention is important to her.

"The relationship has been wonderful," Mills Tate said. "It's important to us that any training program have a BlueCross feel and flavor. Zenger Folkman has done a good job at that."

As the BlueCross organization development team considers the coming turnover among leadership ranks, they feel confident they are on track and prepared. They look forward to conducting further 360-degree feedback with the summit "graduates" to measure improvement and highlight areas for continued emphasis.

"I look at the other training organizations that we were considering and I don't think anybody would have done a better job," she said. "I am very excited with what we are doing with Zenger Folkman."

The Extraordinary Leader™ approach focuses on the ability—in fact, the necessity—for individuals to hone their leadership competencies in key areas, and organizations to develop great leaders in these areas. It provides research-based strategies for strengthening leadership, both in individuals and in organizations, and delivers today's most sensible and flexible leadership development program.