Developing new leaders at Splunk

bts
Strategy made personal

Splunk, a multinational corporation that produces software for searching, monitoring, and analyzing machine-generated big data, needed a powerful, practical and affordable solution for the development of first-time people managers. Experiencing exponential growth of about 50 percent year over year, leaders were quickly being promoted or onboarded to new roles but lacked management experience and an understanding of how to lead at Splunk. Due to the global expansion of the company, they quickly realized that they needed a virtual and scalable solution to reach all employees and keep up with the growth of the business. In order to ensure meaningful and effective leadership development at scale, Splunk partnered with BTS to design a personalized, fully virtual program to empower new leaders at Splunk across the globe. The result was a series of online learning modules to provide new-to-role managers with opportunities to:

1

Learn critical management skills

2

Practice those skills in a risk-free environment

3

Receive feedback from experts and peers on areas in which they need development

Since the first pilot of the **New Leader Program** in 2016, Splunk has continued to partner with BTS to make digital personal for its front-line leaders. Due to its virtual format, the program has been extremely successful. Utilized for Splunk leaders around the world, the program provides individual coaching and creates crucial peer networks that ensure longterm behavior change and growth.

A total of three cohorts go through the program every year, with approximately 25 leaders per cohort. Leaders who attend the program are high-potential individuals who have recently assumed a management position or will be making a leadership transition in the near future.

One month before the journey begins, all participants are sent an email welcoming them to the program and outlining their pre-work. The pre-work helps set the scene for the leaders by providing background on the new behaviors they will learn and experience in the program. The program officially launches with a 90-minute cohort kickoff call featuring an executive sponsor from Splunk, who talks to the leaders about the value of the journey and their path to success. The sponsor helps demonstrate to the participants the importance of the program, which ensures full engagement. The kickoff call is mandatory for all participants, which establishes the program as an important commitment.

The kickoff is hosted as a live virtual session focused on creating a **leadership mindset**. During the call, participants explore the learning journey and what to expect over the coming months. They discuss the shift from individual contributors to becoming people managers, and what new mindsets they need to develop as well as leave behind.

The Journey manifests as three four-week cycles:

After the kickoff call, participants enter into a three-month training period, where each month is its own four-week module focused on developing a particular leadership skill. The first is **Giving feedback and coaching.** During this module leaders learn a simple, systematic approach for providing feedback that helps make their one-on-one and development conversations more effective.

Each four-week module starts with a one-week learning session called **Practice with an Expert.** In the session, each participant is paired with a BTS Assessment coach, the "expert," to practice new skills, set goals and receive feedback. Each session starts with 30 minutes of e-learning and online quizzes, presented in short learning-burst videos that teach critical new manager behaviors in an easy-to-consume format. Participants then practice the new skills in one-to-one role-plays over a video call with the BTS coach. After this experience, coaches engage in development conversations with each leader, giving feedback on what went well and what could have gone better. Participants then enact another role play based on scenarios from their own work lives, which is followed by more coaching to improve performance, motivate, and direct ongoing learning.

STEP 1

Cohort Kickoff

Leadership mindset

STEP 2

Month of ...

(e.g. feedback).

3 modules of skill building each following the same process over one month

Week 1

Learn and practice with an expert

Week 2

Try it in the real world

Week 3

Peer coaching call - what is working, what is not? Simulation

Week 4

Try it in the real world

STEP 3

Reflection

Path forward and graduation

Weeks two through five:

After practicing with an expert, participants spend the second week trying out the new skills in their daily work life. Each participant is assigned "Go-Dos," which are assignments intentionally created to propel development. BTS Assessment coaches direct participants' to complete specific Go-Dos to provide structure for testing out new behaviors on the job and ensure that individuals realize maximum behavior change.

After a week of trying out the skills back on the job, participants reconnect with their Splunk cohort and peer coach during the third week. As a group, they have the opportunity to discuss and exchange feedback regarding the new skills as well as take turns coaching each other and practicing their skills. Discussing these Go-Dos builds community and harnesses the power of peers in driving change. Peer-coaching techniques help participants cement the bonds made in the virtual sessions, developing a network of fellow managers that they can access as they move through their careers.

Participants spend the fourth and final week of the module executing the skill in the real world. Equipped with the rich feedback and knowledge gained from previous weeks, the four-week cycle repeats itself again, each round focusing on a different leader skillset. At the beginning of each round, every participant gets detailed feedback from their coach, including areas to work on and other development needs that should be addressed.

The journey concludes with a live virtual session focused on reflection, creating a path forward and as a final touch: a celebratory graduation ceremony. The participants all receive a graduation package in advance of the session with tools, take-aways, and a small gift for a virtual toast. The executive sponsor who was on the initial cohort kickoff call also rejoins for the final graduation call – asking questions and listening to each individual's feedback on how they grew and developed throughout the journey, which holds participants accountable. In addition, each participant and their manager receive an overview report from the coaching sessions which outlines their strengths and development areas. Although the journey is fully virtual, the experience is highly personalized and gives participants both individual attention and high-quality practice, as well as peer support networks and a common leadership language to sustain behavior change and become great leaders at Splunk.

Results:

This highly iterative and experiential approach to leadership development leaves participants feeling deeply empowered and supported. Even the managers of high potential leaders who experienced the program were impressed by the results they saw, noting the positive impact on all team members' growth.

Impact:

92.5%
"The overall learning experience was valuable"

95.4%
"I believe the skills developed in the program will help me be more effective as a leader at Splunk"

Feedback

"Splunk Leader Program has changed the way I see team management and the way I'm approaching certain processes related to the management of my team."

"Gave me a different outlook on my team and personal approach. I hope to apply the skills I have learned to grow as a individual and grow my team to be more successful."

"I loved the way the content was presented and the multiple opportunities to practice skills that I can immediately apply. It felt like such a gift to take two days to focus on my growth and how I can better support my team.

"One of the most impactful and well-rounded trainings I've had in my life."

What was most valuable?

"I found discussing real-life examples with the coach and peers useful to help affirm how the information could be used in my day-to-day job."

"The blended learning approach, having the opportunity to watch the modules, download the resources, interact with the live coaches, and learn from my peers in the cohorts. It was fantastic and timely."

How will the information gained from the New Leader Program impact your work and your team?

"Keeping the handouts and notes I took and referring back to them when coaching my team, delegating, and working through communication."

"I am very thoughtful in how I prepare my feedback and refer to the guidelines and resources regularly for insight on everything from feedback to planning my upcoming offsite."