

WILEY



Taking Teamwork to the Next Level

A Success Story featuring :

Braskem

Is your high performing team actually operating at peak effectiveness?

POLYPROPYLENE, A TYPE OF PLASTIC

with uses ranging from reusable shopping bags to automobile products, plays a major role in everyday life. Among several global achievements, Braskem America stands as the largest polypropylene producer in the United States. It's no wonder that the team in charge of their polypropylene business – from the purchasing of raw materials to sales – had to be a high-performing unit. Although they were a newly reorganized team, they worked well together, and the business was running smoothly overall. But like any good team leader, Mark Nikolich wanted to dig deeper and take his team to the next level.

THE SPIRIT OF INNOVATION

Braskem is rated as a “Top Workplace” in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, and they credit much of their success to their investment in employee and team development. Their energy, growth, and high regard for innovation stems from a company culture that emphasizes principles such as trust and continuous development, and demonstrates the great value that Braskem puts on their employees and their welfare.

With openness to growth embedded in their foundation, the Philadelphia-based polypropylene team was no stranger to training programs that supported their personal and professional development, but they had yet to experience a program together as a team. Even with a group of

high-performing individuals, Nikolich knew his team could be stronger, but he had a difficult time defining exactly what that meant. He worked with Kelly Elizardo, Braskem's Culture, Learning, and Development leader to find a sustainable program that would fit their needs.

“The team was provocative and challenge-oriented on business topics but not tuned in to their individual relationships as team members,” Nikolich says. “I wanted a practical team building activity that was founded in behaviors and relationships that could be customized to enhance relationships and take the team to a higher level of performance.”

SOLUTION FOR SUCCESS

When Susan Cullen, President of Quantum Learning Solutions, Inc. and a Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team Authorized Partner and Accredited Facilitator, offered The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team™ as a solution, Elizardo made a clear connection to Braskem's values. Based on best-selling author Patrick Lencioni's leadership fable *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, The Five Behaviors™ program is an assessment-based learning experience that helps teams discover what it takes to become more cohesive and productive.

The Five Behaviors program helps teams improve effectiveness and productivity by practicing the five pillars of teamwork: trust, conflict, commitment, accountability, and



results. By combining this framework with a personality assessment, the program emphasizes the value of diverse personality styles on a team and demonstrates how to effectively work with these unique styles in order to fully engage The Five Behaviors model.

OPENING UP TO THE PROCESS

The nine team members embarked upon their Five Behaviors journey. They reviewed their assessment results and were surprised to find their lowest score in trust, the foundation of the Five Behaviors model. “It made me realize that maybe we weren’t as good as I imagined,” says Kevin Towles, Director of Strategy, “but that reset the bar in terms of expectations.”

As the facilitator, Cullen introduced the first behavior to the team with a memorable activity that challenged each person to be vulnerable by sharing information about

their personal lives. This expanded their perspectives beyond their functional work roles and helped them gain a better understanding of everyone’s personality style.

“When you’re talking about your background and challenges you overcame in your personal life, you start connecting the dots with why someone may behave or think like they do. That was very powerful,” says Darrell Williams, Director of Sales. Identifying himself as a “gut-feel guy,” he had a tendency to react defensively when people in manufacturing, who had an inclination for data, questioned his methodologies and sales approach. “I felt I was being attacked and they thought they were trying to help, so we really had to evolve which made us better in the end,” he says.

By experiencing vulnerability-based trust, the team was able to see the key role it plays in teamwork. With that understanding, they were able to put vulnerability-based trust into action. In one instance, Williams and a team member had a disagreement, which is common in any organization. What’s uncommon – and takes more effort – is that they apologized to each other. “I don’t think we would have done that six months ago,” says Williams. “I think we would have given the cold shoulder until the next meeting.” Being able to apologize and admit mistakes is a vital part of vulnerability-based trust. Experiencing that firsthand can be a huge contributor to the team’s overall well-being.

“The Five Behaviors has a long-lasting impact that people will remember for the rest of their careers.”

— Susan Cullen, President, Quantum Learning Solutions, Inc.

PRACTICE MAKES PROGRESS

After establishing trust, the team worked through the modules on conflict, commitment, accountability, and results through four offsite workshops over a seven-month period. Like any healthy team, they needed to practice the behaviors over time in order to see results. The group created an action plan at the end of each workshop that reinforced what they had learned. One significant result of their action planning was streamlining their staff meetings. Rather than have team meetings run for one full day, they implemented two half-day meetings, giving themselves time to digest information as well as socialize with each other. The team incorporated a feedback loop into their meeting agenda so that no unanswered questions were left behind. These simple action items made a huge impact, and their team meetings ran better than ever.

After six months, Cullen walked the team through their Progress Report to show them how far they had come. The polypropylene team improved in each of the behaviors, including trust. More importantly, they created a set of shared beliefs they could refer to moving forward; they determined what was important to them as a team. “We trust each other and the team” and “Embrace passionate, respectful, and constructive conflict,” are just two examples of how they organically embedded The Five Behaviors into their shared beliefs. “It was a great

way to recap where they’ve been and where they’re going,” says Cullen.

EXPANDING BEYOND THE TEAM

“The Five Behaviors has a long-lasting impact that people will remember for the rest of their careers. It will impact the way they work on any future teams, too,” says Cullen. Braskem is the perfect example of the great influence this program can have throughout an organization. Although the original nine members of the polypropylene team have been reorganized since their Five Behaviors experience, the power of the program has not fallen through the cracks. The team’s growth illustrated The Five Behaviors model and caused a ripple effect throughout the Philadelphia headquarters. The behaviors as well as the program itself have permeated throughout Braskem, resulting in plans to bring the full facilitated program to teams in various departments.

The Five Behaviors’ ability to translate across departments demonstrates its versatility and the unlimited value it can have for an organization in any industry. “It’s spreading and that’s a testament to its effectiveness,” says Nikolich. “It’s beautiful in its simplicity. It’s practical, measurable, and you can use it in the context of your own company culture with real things that are happening in business today, which makes it that much more powerful.”