

As leaders advance, the demands upon their leadership skills change. Easter Seals New Hampshire recently promoted a Vice President and found new roles for two Directors. Within months of working with Debora McLaughlin, all three turned their challenging work and team environments into a true collaboration.

Case Study: Easter Seals NH

by Sharon Bailly, TWP Marketing & Technical Communications

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Tina Sharby,
Senior Vice President
of Human Resources,
Easter Seals New Hampshire

Easter Seals New Hampshire (Easter Seals NH) looked forward to assigning greater responsibilities to three executives with superior talents. But all three had gaps in the leadership and communication skills required by their new positions, affecting their ability to inspire teams, ignite performance and impact results. When Easter Seals NH decided to hire an executive coach, they faced the questions raised by most organizations in that situation: Where would the coach's loyalties lie—with the hiring business or with the employee being coached? How would employees react to mandated coaching? And what result for the organization would justify the cost?

Easter Seals NH asked their Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to recommend a coach. The EAP suggested Debora McLaughlin and The Renegade Leader™.

As McLaughlin knows from her many years working with executives in both for profit and nonprofit organizations, leadership is a skill all its own. “Employees are surprised to learn that the knowledge and skills that got them promoted are often not the skills needed to be effective leaders, especially at the executive level,” McLaughlin explains. “Navigating different personalities, building teams, influencing the culture of the organization and having fiscal responsibility can be trying.”

The high turnover that results from poor leadership exacts a huge cost for the entire company in rehiring, orienting, training and stress. By contrast, McLaughlin explains, “Employees working for managers with leadership and coaching skills outperform their peers by 30% and are more likely to remain with an organization. People join organizations, but they leave managers.”

To prevent conflict of interest between the goals of employees and employers, McLaughlin follows two overriding principles that guide her work with any business or nonprofit:

- Understand and respect the message from the top, the big vision.

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Director,
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Hampshire

- Respect the confidence and talents of the person being coached.

“Debora gets it,” states Tina Sharby, Senior Vice President of Human Resources at Easter Seals NH, “She understood our agency and she guided the coachees in a way that was beneficial to the agency and to them. We all knew she had no hidden agenda, and it was nice to have an outside perspective.”

The executives who were selected for coaching agree. One of the directors states, “I think Debora’s clinical background is a tremendous asset to her coaching. She immediately put me at ease. When I started working with her, I was tightly wound and experiencing stress. Debora dramatically improved my relationship with my supervisees. There’s been no turnover since she started and we ended coaching months ago.”

“You have to identify the leadership style that is most effective for each manager and the people he or she manages,” says McLaughlin. “I help to bring out the authentic leader in my clients. Everyone’s style is different. I introduce them to leadership strategies that work for today’s employees and help them to respect and to tune into the unique needs of their employees.”

Like nonprofits everywhere these days Easter Seals NH suffers from decreased funding. Recognizing their financial needs, McLaughlin built an innovative solution combining live, web-based and train-the-trainer programs. McLaughlin states, “The value we gave positively affected the bottom line for Easter Seals NH. Aside from the savings from reduced turnover, the improvements in communication and leadership from the managers and their reduced stress transformed employee engagement and created a healthier environment at every level.”

“Before we chose Debora,” Sharby recalls, “we interviewed three different coaches. Debora offered solutions and suggestions that would work in *our* organization. She came up with a program that fit *our* budget. She has the professional skills, the personal skills—the whole package. She is very creative and intuitive. You could visibly see the change in the people she worked with.”

With one manager already promoted from director to vice president, with the other director and vice president much more secure in their career path and with high turnover no longer considered “the cost of doing business,” Easter Seals NH has asked McLaughlin to continue her relationship with their organization. She is currently coaching another director who is being groomed for a vice president’s position and has many of the same concerns as her previous East Seals clients. “I like working with up and coming employees,” says McLaughlin, “those managers and executives who need a leading edge.”



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