



Holcim Leverages *The Advantage Way*SM to Create Measurable Business Results



Holcim used *The Advantage Way*SM which resulted in documented results of significant cost savings for the two Holcim plants.

Managers' ability to apply leadership training to business challenges improves key plant metrics for global manufacturer

Need

In October 2005, two North American subsidiaries of Swiss-based Holcim, Ltd—a leading worldwide supplier of cement and aggregates (crushed stone, sand and gravel), readymix concrete, asphalt and associated services—teamed to create a dedicated training organization whose initial aims were to

- develop leaders.
- drive the key leadership traits of accountability and execution in areas of major significance to the business.

These two goals ranked at the top of a list of business challenges identified in a survey of senior executives at the subsidiaries, Holcim (US) and St. Lawrence Cement. As such, the goals became the focus of the first initiative for Holcim's new North American Learning Center (NALC).

Creating Leaders Who Can Meet Key Goals

To provide the business learning opportunities for developing effective, accountable leaders, the NALC devised and introduced three Building Leader Performance (BLP) demonstration projects in 2006. These projects took place at plants in the U.S. and Canada.

"Our BLP program is designed to equip managers and supervisors with the leadership skills they need to meet specific business objectives," says Lisa Bell, Manager of the North American Learning Center. "To ensure that training and learning are tied to specific business results, BLP implements the *High Impact Learning* approach designed by Advantage Performance Group."

"By taking this approach, we can provide a quality learning experience for the BLP participants, one that creates a focus and intentionality in their learning and aligns it with key business issues, and supports their performance improvement by providing an action plan by which they are measured after the training."

Leveraging Core Tools from Advantage

Holcim recognized that great training content was an important ingredient for producing the business and development results, but not sufficient in itself. They believed that business impact and lasting development would occur only by getting away from the "training event" mentality. Instead of operating with the shortsighted view that training produces business outcomes and behavior change, they used *The Advantage Way*SM process that states that actions before and after a training event play as big—if not more of—a role in producing the final results as the training event alone.

This training for the supervisors and managers in the plants included two one-day workshops. The first workshop, *Symphony* (from Advantage alliance partner The Real Learning Company),

[continued]

“We wanted to implement a complete learning-to-performance process. To that end Advantage’s High Impact Learning process was invaluable.”

➔ continued

equips managers with tools and skills needed to assess, plan, and manage individual and team performance. The second workshop, Real Learning’s *Conductor*, took place about four weeks later. It developed coaching skills and the ability to give constructive and effective job-performance feedback.

Overall, participants and their managers learned how to:

- draw a clear “line of sight” between their daily activities and business results.
- achieve alignment on the corporate direction.
- understand what is expected of them.
- work together toward common objectives, including giving more feedback, clarifying expectations, and adapting communication to behavior styles.

Holcim didn’t want to leave it to chance that once back on the job, plant supervisors and managers would be prepared to apply the new skills to important business challenges. Therefore, Impact Booster sessions were conducted with the trainees’ managers. These sessions created alignment for all levels of managers on the importance of the training, how it was designed to help address current business challenges, and the managers’ critical roles in maximizing results from the training.

Manager Participation is a Key Cornerstone

As the next step in the *High Impact Learning* process, BLP participants and their managers met before and after the training to establish a link between learning and business objectives, and to use resources from the training to achieve sustainable results. “This is a cornerstone of the BLP program,” Bell says. “It gives us a way to ensure that the participants actually use what they learned in the *Symphony* and *Conductor* workshops when back on the job and that their learning aligns with areas of real business significance to the company.”

“It’s not enough to put people through a leadership training program and assume they will return to their job and start using what they’ve learned,” continues Bell. “We wanted to implement a complete learning-to-performance process. To that end, Advantage’s *High Impact Learning* process was invaluable. It gave participants a chance to work with their managers to identify a business-critical issue—recognized as such by senior management—for applying their learned behaviors. And it gave managers a tool for holding the participants accountable for engaging with the business issue and applying what they learned.”

BLP Initiative Pays Off

A thorough evaluation study (the *Success Case Evaluation Method*[®]) two months after training indicated that the BLP and *High Impact Learning* approach paid off with significant results for the organization.

Each BLP project focused on improvements in a key business objective selected by senior management of St. Lawrence Cement and Holcim (US). BLP was used as a resource for helping accelerate the results of these initiatives. Although there were other factors beyond the *Symphony* and *Conductor* workshops (and discussions participants had with their supervisors before and after training) that contributed to the results achieved by each facility, the stories reported in the final Success Case Evaluation illustrate specific areas where the training played a critical role in helping to achieve the results.

From better management of net working capital to efficiency improvements to safety and housekeeping improvements, there are numerous documented cases of how BLP has provided significant cost savings for St. Lawrence Cement and Holcim (US).

Using the *High Impact Learning* process to drive the BLP program has helped Holcim managers develop valuable leadership skills, which in turn have contributed to the achievement of important business goals. Participants who followed the process were two times more likely to apply the learning in ways that led to significant and measurable results than participants who only attended the *Symphony* and *Conductor* workshops. Nearly 75% of the managers who reported significant and measurable results met with their manager to create an Impact Map before the training and discussed it with their manager after the training. The North American Learning Center recognizes that building this focus, alignment, and accountability is vital for turning training into business outcomes.

“These are important measures of success,” says Bell. “Participants were twice as likely to get effective results if they and their managers followed the *High Impact Learning* process. For senior managers who want to get better results, the message is simple: Follow the process. The process works. If we don’t follow the process, there is a less than 50% chance that we will achieve a satisfactory result.”

BLP trainees and their managers now understand their critical role in getting results from training. “When trainees see the ‘line of sight’ between what they are learning, how they are

[continued]

Actions before and after a training event play as big—if not more of—a role in producing the final results as the training event alone.

➔ continued

expected to apply it, and what results they'll get—and realize that their managers care and will be supporting them—it's very motivating," says Bell. Equipped with new performance management insights and skills, including an improved sense of accountability, BLP trainees have the tools to impact significant business objectives. "Trainees now know that managing performance isn't in addition to their job—it is their job," Bell explains. "And they're confident in their ability to execute. Being able to actually see the results of their learning in action—in the improved behaviors, reactions, and results of their people—makes all the difference." ♦

