ENSPIRE LEARNING CASE STUDY

Business Acumen Training for Directors

ConAgra Foods chose to incorporate Enspire’s Business Challenge™ into its Leadership in Action program designed to build business acumen and leadership skills across the company’s directors.

Challenge

ConAgra Foods, a Fortune 500 packaged foods company, recognized that improving performance at the director level was a critical component to achieving its revenue and profit goals. Leadership development and business acumen training would significantly increase the company’s performance.

ConAgra Foods partnered with Enspire to create the Leadership in Action program to reach all directors. Enspire’s business finance simulation, Business Challenge™, served as a centerpiece of this new program and taught directors to:

► Understand the relationships between operational decisions and financial measures at the company and product line level
► Increase financial literacy and understanding of financial statements
► Develop foundational expertise in investment and ROI analysis
► Relate strategy and execution at the operational and tactical level

Approach

Enspire worked with ConAgra to create a blended learning program with two major components: Fluent in Finance™ and Business Challenge™.

Fluent in Finance™ is a six-hour finance course for non-financial managers that combines tutorials, case studies, and challenging interactivities. Program participants completed Fluent in Finance™ as pre-work before the classroom simulation experience. Business Challenge™, a multiplayer business acumen simulation, allowed program participants to read financial statements and make strategic business decisions based on financial metrics. Participants were paired into teams and competed against each other in a dynamic marketplace. Leading a virtual company, participants executed strategic business decisions, balanced sales growth with cash flow, managed inventory levels and accounts receivable terms, and analyzed financial statements to make operational and investment decisions.

Simulation debriefs were targeted to ConAgra’s business and included custom-developed components such as debriefs, issues, and exercises. Rich debriefs and final presentations brought learning to life and allow participants to relate learning objectives to their own job.
This blended program was the third of three classroom experiences delivered to a cohort over a six-month period. It integrated seamlessly with two other high-impact learning opportunities designed by ConAgra to complete the Leadership in Action program.

**Outcome**

ConAgra has reached 60% of all director-level employees and has plans to reach the remainder during 2011. The program has been met with overwhelming success. ConAgra conducted a survey following a *Business Challenge* experience. When asked what the most important thing they learned from the simulation, answers included:

- “It was a good way to really experience how business decision impacts a company’s financial statement. For me, being in a role with little insight in the finance side, it illustrated the effect of real business decisions.”
- “Fiscal responsibility is required at all levels of the company. ‘Simple’ decisions can sometimes be very costly.”
- “Success is never based on a single metric. You need to balance and watch all levers.”
- “You have to understand the trade-offs and make decisions based on calculated risks. You will never have all the parameters needed to guide you.”
- “Since I'm not in finance, this course has helped me to understand how strategies and decisions affect market capitalization and stock prices. We tend to get caught up in our own worlds and don't think about the bigger picture.”
- “Take the emotion out of decisions. Work on being more prepared in a financially driven world.”

Senior Director of Leadership Development Robbie Rettmer commented, “*Business Challenge* is the ideal capstone activity for Learning in Action as it provides a challenging learning experience that links together our key program objectives. Enspire Learning's facilitation of the simulation is outstanding, as their team continually seeks to ensure that ConAgra Foods' specific content remains relevant to our changing business environment. Based on participant responses, I can say that *Business Challenge* and *Fluent in Finance* have created a definite impact with real return.”