

Customized communication training helps retail managers become confident business leaders

THE SITUATION

“Quick Chek believes in strong leadership,” says Bob Graczyk, VP of Human Resources for the growing Northeast convenience chain. “Store leaders are a critical part of our business, and investing in them and helping them grow is a core value of our company.”

The 40-year-old organization’s miss — A Great Place to Work, A Great Place to Shop and A Great Place to Invest — is embodied by an extraordinary commitment to professional development, as demonstrated by its Presidents Leadership Council (PLC). Each year, the PLC brings together a broad cross-section of top-performing employees for collaborative training initiatives to build both tactical and leadership skills.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Communication skills are a critical component of the PLC, according to Bob:

“We want to make sure that our leaders at all levels are very good at what they do and develop strong leadership skills over time. Part of that is being able to communicate thoughts and ideas in a way that expresses leadership. Presentation skills are one of the many tools we use to help people reach a high level of performance, both personally and professionally.”

For the last four years, Bob has engaged Stephanie Scotti of Professionally Speaking to deliver a two-day workshop for PLC members to hone both their communication and leadership skills. Highly customized to the Quick Chek culture, the interactive sessions deliver a two-fold benefit: participants gain hands-on presentation skills practice, and can also volunteer for certification as workshop leaders to coach their peers.

THE RESULTS

Having attended the workshop as both a participant and as a workshop leader, Store Leader Therese Lamontagne is delighted by her increased confidence and effectiveness.

“I found it more difficult to stand up in front of peers and senior management than strangers. This program gave me tools to keep my presentation organized and concise, and to stay on topic. In store meetings, I’m so much better prepared and comfortable taking questions.”

District Leader, Donna Kane, a 22-year Quick Chek veteran who oversees 12 stores, has seen the results of the training in herself and others.

“I’ve watched store leaders learn to open up — the training totally changed them. They are now more willing to stop up and actively participate in meetings rather than just sit back and listen. It’s definitely made me more vocal, more confident, and given me the skills to communicate with customers, staff, and management.”

Why is the program so effective year after year? Participants point to the structure, Stephanie's ability to customize the training to the QuickChek culture, as well as the enhanced value that comes with serving in a mentoring role. According to Donna,

“Stephanie creates a comfortable, no-pressure atmosphere. She knows our company and culture very well, and it shows. I'm excited to come back this year as a coach and help other people overcome what I had to overcome.”

Though PLC members may be hesitant about presenting at first, Bob says the feedback he receives is overwhelmingly positive.

“There's no doubt that there is an element of fear for some going into this, but the dynamics encourage people to get out of their comfort zone. We see a clear difference in how participants' 'show-up' at work following the training. Everyone demonstrates/achieves a new level of confidence; they feel stronger in their jobs and in their lives.”

Therese compares the workshop to the 'Play to Win' ropes course used by QuickChek for leadership development and team-building.

“You're terrified, but once you complete Stephanie's workshop you say, 'This was one of the best experiences of my life.'”