

DEVELOPING GRADUATE LEADERSHIP SKILLS

THE BACKGROUND

Since 2009, AstraZeneca Global Operations has successfully run a graduate development programme, led with tireless commitment by the Programme Manager, David Westbury. The programme's excellence has been recognised both internally and externally and its objective is to provide a robust pipeline of talented future leaders across Global Operations and more widely across AstraZeneca. Graduates worldwide, able to demonstrate remarkable technical and leadership skills, undergo a rigorous selection process to join the pharmaceuticals giant. Once recruited, they embark on a challenging and highly stimulating three-year development programme. They complete three eight-month placements, including one overseas, before undertaking their final 'consolidation' role for a period of 12 months. Upon successful completion of the programme, they are fully integrated into leadership roles within the business.

From their induction event onwards, participants are encouraged to take ownership for their own development with support from David, the programme's Steering Group and line managers. However, on completion of their second year and



before embarking on their consolidation role, they are all asked to take part in a 'Transition Workshop'. The workshop's key objective is to set the graduates up for success in their consolidation role and to give them the tools and techniques to continue to develop as leaders as they step away from the consistent support of the programme infrastructure.

Until 2015, David had very successfully facilitated the event with excellent feedback from all participants. However, faced with the challenging workload of leading a high profile global programme and based on a desire to bring new thinking to the Transition Workshop, David decided to put the work out to tender. In addition, he felt that it would be more beneficial for the participants if he were able to observe the workshop rather than deliver it, as it would enable him to focus on any graduates who needed extra support.

Of the consultancies that bid for the work, Oakridge was successful as its proposal was extremely targeted to the needs of AstraZeneca's culturally diverse group of 22 graduates who comprised the Class of 2013. The proposal also demonstrated a strong understanding both of the programme and the business. Furthermore, it was also a real attraction for David and the Steering Group, in making their decision, that Oakridge could offer one facilitator from the UK and one from the US, providing cultural diversity.

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OUR APPROACH

Our approach in ensuring the success of the workshop was to listen very carefully to David's brief and to build an event that provided both support and challenge to the participants, taking into account their differing learning styles and cultural needs.

We designed a three-day Graduate Transition Workshop, with the first day focusing on the crucial leadership skills of influencing and conflict-handling. Day two encouraged the participants to develop a much greater understanding of their leadership style and its strengths and liabilities. The third day was devoted to career resilience and networking.

The workshop was delivered from 11 to 14 May in Gaithersberg, United States and was co-facilitated by Oakridge senior consultants, Anna White from the UK and Ed Hunter from the US, with input from David Westbury.

Anna and Ed engaged the graduates throughout, thanks to their use of a variety of tools and techniques such as tutorials, questionnaires and feedback, group exercises and discussions, videos, peer coaching, elevator pitch, role play and individual reflection. Anna and Ed also coached the attendees in creating a personalised transition plan, enabling each one of them to describe the skills and behaviours needed to drive their success and to help them to excel.

Each of the graduates was also given access to a learning log, which they completed and reviewed during and after each of the three days, enabling them to reflect on how they would apply their learning back at the workplace, to their leadership journey and to their career development.

RESULTS

Following the workshop, 22 graduates from 11 different countries are now in a position to play an active part in managing their career and personal development, leveraging the leadership and career development skills that they learned and practised during the workshop.

Feedback from the participants was outstanding, with graduates commenting that the Transition Workshop stood out as a key highlight in their career with AstraZeneca.

Based on the feedback from the graduates, David has invited Anna and Ed to run a similar Transition Workshop in 2016 for the Class of 2014.

Anna White, senior consultant at Oakridge said: *"It is testimony to the calibre of people recruited to AstraZeneca's graduate programme that we had the opportunity to work with such a wonderful group who fully engaged with every activity and asked important and challenging questions. It was a joy to work with them."*

David Westbury commented following the workshop:

"I was looking for consultants who could provide a bespoke, end-to-end solution; designing, preparing and delivering an effective programme for our graduates."

"The work was put out to tender and Oakridge was the only consultancy that fully understood our business and its culture, designing a workshop specifically for my needs instead of presenting an off-the-shelf solution."

"With fresh ideas and using modern tools and techniques, Oakridge offered excellent value for money. There was an immediate trust between myself, Anna and Ed and they were quick to build a great rapport with our graduates too."