

# *What is leadership?* New definition drives change at Michelin North America

CHANGING PARADIGMS

You're a manager at Michelin North America. Radial tires have become a commodity, not an innovation, and competition is threatening. Reorganization has eliminated several layers of management. The company is sleeker, faster, better organized and growing to meet future needs. However, you just can't get a handle on your seemingly endless responsibilities and details. You're working 80 hours a week and still not done. You haven't had dinner with your family for months. Your son is halfway through his soccer season and you haven't seen one Saturday game. You don't even know what rush-hour traffic is like! Leadership? Strategy? Delegation? Normal workweek? Who has time for that?



A thorough needs assessment and vigorous top-down implementation plan were critical to this successful change effort, according to Michelin consultants.

**O**ne manager sums up the situation with these words: "I don't lead because I'm too busy, and I'm too busy because I don't lead."

However, things are getting better for Michelin's 23,000 employees in North America, especially for the 1,500 managers whose plight is described here. The improvement is largely due to a top-down leadership development series that incorporates learning

leadership skills, personal development activities, on-the-job assignments related to the learning, and organizational problem-solving workout sessions.

One manager has cut his workweek from 88 to 60 hours by finding ways to "work smarter." Another eliminated up to 50 percent of the meetings he attends by demanding an agenda and rationale for his presence before saying he'll attend. Others have found ways to

minimize unnecessary e-mail and voicemail messages. One manager was able to spend time with an important client and save a lucrative business relationship. There's more coaching and developing of future leaders.

The effects of the Michelin Leadership Series and the new "work smart" practices are most noticeable at the top levels, and they are beginning to be felt further down in the organization. The senior group is redefining leadership at Michelin. As they develop new work practices and solutions, excitement is kindled throughout Michelin, and the biggest challenge now is scheduling Leadership Series sessions fast enough to accommodate the demand as the initiative cascades to lower levels of management.

Why is this initiative working so well? Milan Mizerovsky, head of training and development for Michelin North America, credits three key factors: the needs assessment, implementation plan and an outside partner to supply program expertise.

"Seldom have I seen a better job of needs analysis done," he says. "Virtually everybody was involved at some point. Surveys, focus groups, organizational effectiveness workshops all surfaced similar issues. We

gathered a great weight of evidence and saw a clear, consistent picture of what was needed."

### A clear need

Internal consultant Joel Dobson approached top business leaders in the organization to discuss the initial findings of the assessment. He asked one question: "Do we have a culture that supports leadership development?" The answer: "No, we do not." It clearly was time to take action.

The symptoms described at the beginning of this article reflected longstanding organizational and personal barriers

that grew out of the 110-year-old company's traditional emphasis on product quality and functional expertise.

"There was a part of our culture that said your worth was assessed by your devotion. Everybody, in a mutually reinforced system, thought that you needed to show some scars on your back to prove your value to the company," Dobson says.

"We knew what we wanted to do but were bogged down in the implementation," says

Mizerovsky. "Eliminating work and reducing hours were surface issues. What we really needed was to redefine the leadership role at Michelin." Michelin engaged AchieveGlobal to complete the needs analysis, reassess the findings and create a program to meet the needs.

### A trainer's dream come true

From long experience in training and development, Mizerovsky recalled classic barriers to training and

I've got this problem, too."

What happened next was a training director's dream come true. Because of the needs assessment activity, people began talking. The solution, which didn't even exist yet, was fast acquiring a certain amount of cachet. Already, senior managers were expressing their support for the program. In fact, they couldn't wait to get started.

Mizerovsky says, "When I presented our proposal for the Leadership Series to

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development programs: "You end up just going to enjoy the croissants. You think to yourself, 'This is really good stuff but it won't do me any good unless my manager goes.'

"Senior managers don't explain why it will be useful and they don't hold participants accountable for what they learn," he continues. Imagine his surprise when he asked senior managers to "let some of their middle managers participate in a focus group and their response was, 'Why them?

senior management I was looking for support and acceptance, and what I got was, 'The best way to help us and the organization is to have us participate first. We will lead the change.'"

Dobson tells this story: "One day, I ran into a top leader who had just been giving appraisals to his direct reports. Person after person was saying, 'I can't keep working like this. Not enough hours in the day. Don't know my family.' He called me into his office and

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said, ‘When are you going to have something for me? I can’t take it any longer.’ That was August 1998. When the first pilot of the program began in December of that year, this leader and his direct reports were the first participants. Since his group was responsible for the replacement tire business (70 percent of North American business) we were on our way!”

### Training and more

Michelin introduced a system that would change the whole approach to leadership in the company. The objectives go far beyond improving leadership skills. Most sessions involve hands-on personal or organizational development activities, all tied directly to the participants’ jobs and the Michelin culture. The objective is to move the very definition of leadership away from functionalism, into better ways of working and developing future leaders.

Only 10 percent of the six-module Leadership Series content resembles traditional skills training. The remainder focuses on job-related personal and organizational development. The Series culminates in a Workout Session, in which solutions to higher-level organizational barriers are presented to senior management, agreed upon and put into action.

### Scheduling: beyond the classroom

Overworked managers are often reluctant to leave their jobs for a week of training and development, fearing things will fall apart if they aren’t at their desks. So this implementation consists of six one-day modules, spaced from two weeks to a month apart.

Between the modules, “On-the-Job Opportunities” enhance what has already been learned or serve as preparation for an upcoming module. These activities integrate the Series into the way they work. Participants do collateral assignments at their desks and in their normal job by tracking their time, conducting 360-degree feedback assessments, and more.

Personal development takes place through “provocative opportunities” that cause them to pause and think and discuss. The program does not say, “you should do this, you should not do that.”

To ensure real organizational change occurs, the Leadership Series is being implemented in a top-down cascading fashion, with the senior leadership in each business unit participating first. Intact work groups participate together so that team-wide issues and opportunities can be addressed in the session.

### Facilitators

Three internal consultants (Mizerovsky, Dobson and Fred Bolivar) join AchieveGlobal training experts in facilitating the Leadership Series. The presence of these experienced and respected Michelin managers ensures the relevance and impact of the program. They present the introductory module and attend every module to add credibility and keep discussions Michelin-focused and productive.

“The success of this dual facilitation arrangement has been one of those unexpected surprises—very enriching,” observes Mizerovsky. “The facilitators from AchieveGlobal and Michelin complement each other and each can make points that the other may not be in a position to discuss.”

### Follow-up

To further enhance the experience, AchieveGlobal facilitators make follow-up visits to answer questions and coach former participants on personal and organizational development issues. This process works well, they say, because the facilitators are experienced coaches, they already know the learner from the training, and they already enjoy a trusting and comfortable relationship with the managers.

### Results

The Leadership Series has become much more than an efficiency enhancer. It’s a vehicle for seriously taking stock of leadership and life. “When people begin to look at the work they do and the life they live—and see a balance—that’s when we’ll succeed,” says Dobson.

Mizerovsky notes that the first time he presented an overview to a group that was considering going through the Series, one executive said, “Just give us the module about work elimination. We don’t need the rest.” Mizerovsky stood firm on requiring participation in the entire program. Now a convert, that individual has made a video for his organization, describing his personal 50-hour work-week challenge and challenging others to examine the way they work and lead.

The Leadership Series has become a benchmark for conducting a needs assessment and using it to develop and implement a dynamic program that makes a difference in the organization’s leadership culture. ■

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For more information about this successful change effort, visit [www.achieveglobal.com](http://www.achieveglobal.com).