



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## BUSINESS LEADERSHIP TRAINING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Do not get caught limiting your definition of “workforce development” to entry-level job skills. As a member of a Private Industry Council, Georgia Regional Advisory Council on Economic Development, and Chair of a Workforce Development subcommittee of the Regional Advisory Council, I have experienced many discussions, strategies, and meetings on workforce development needs. Usually, the focus of such occasions is basic literacy skills, information technology, and employee work ethics. However, I have noticed a significant gap in workforce training.

In the past 12 months I visited with CEO’s, human resource directors, and training officers for more than 100 businesses and industries. I listened to plea after plea for business leadership training for front-line and mid-managers. The scenario described by each business was surprisingly similar. A business hires a new employee at a lower position; the employee becomes a good asset to the company and learns the business. Within 1-2 years, the employee is promoted. The employee continues to progress and strives to be a loyal member of the organization. Within another 2-3 years, the employee assumes a managerial or supervisory role but lacks certain managerial skills. However, the employee is a strong asset; the dilemma for the business is how to salvage the employee and strengthen the weak management link caused by the employee’s leadership deficiencies.

A one-year survey of regional industries and businesses was conducted to identify specific gaps and develop a training course to meet regional businesses’ needs. A pilot program was conducted for 40 mid-managers and upper management of Bob’s Candies in Albany, Georgia (Bob’s Candies is the world’s largest producer of striped candies). The survey and pilot program produced a 40-hour program in Business Leadership, covering ten topics applicable to supervisory and managerial functions.

### Business Leadership Topics

- Leadership Styles and Personality Traits
- Team Building
- How to Deal with Difficult People and Difficult Situations
- Workplace Communication Practices
- Legal Issues for the Manager
- Industrial Safety and OSHA
- Time and Project Management
- Corporate Image and How to Teach Customer Service to Employees
- How to do Strategic Planning
- How to Balance Personal and Professional Life

Regional professionals conduct the sessions. They provide: 1) examples, applications, and issues germane to the needs of regional businesses; 2) credibility and ethos since the instructors are working professionals. The course is attractive to employers and employees—the college validates the training with a Continuing Education Certificate in Business Leadership.

The program was first offered as a scheduled 40-clock-hour course, meeting from 6:00-10:00 p.m. on 10 consecutive Mondays, on campus. Personal visits, direct mailings, and newspaper advertisements were used to promote the course. Being in a market of less than 100,000 population, we hoped that the first public offering of the course would garner 10 participants, each paying a fee of \$659. Imagine our surprise when the course filled with over 20 applicants in less than two weeks; a subsequent course was created for another 20 participants. Today, one year after the pilot offering, approximately 80 employees have graduated. More than 20 organizations, including major industries, small businesses, medical facilities, and governmental agencies have sent employees the course.

Comments from student evaluations include:

“Excellent! Best training course I have attended and I have been to a lot over 30 years.” –Regions Bank Employee



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“I highly recommend this course for anyone involved in business. The variety of instructors kept the class interesting. Every session was a new adventure in learning.” –Flint River Textiles Manager

“Very informative! This is the best thing I have done for my job and my employees. The course teaches excellent skills in all areas of managerial leadership.”  
–Palmyra Hospital Nursing Supervisor

“The course is very informative...practices and techniques that are significant in management.” –  
Cooper Tire and Rubber Company Department Leader

The program can be updated easily as time progresses, tailored to a specific client, and replicated for additional markets. The vital elements for success include multiple instructors who are knowledgeable and entertaining, topics that are regionally significant, a certificate that endorses the study, and a fee structure that communicates the importance of the course.

Results of this course indicate: 1) the regional workforce is being significantly strengthened, 2) new mid-managers are retaining their positions, 3) businesses and industries are becoming more productive through more efficient managers, and 4) the course is making an impact on economic development as a workforce development program.

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