

Symetra Supports Rules of Engagement with Fierce Conversations

About Symetra

With more than 50 years of experience, Symetra elevates people's lives through retirement, employee benefits and life insurance products. The company is headquartered in Bellevue, Washington and has approximately 1,200 employees in offices nationwide.

Symetra introduced its employee "Rules of Engagement" to help promote a more participatory culture—where feedback is encouraged, resources are shared and relationships are strong. **This case study outlines the program Symetra developed to support the shift using Fierce models for everyday conversations.**

Symetra's GOALS

1 INCREASE COLLABORATION

"Collaborative skills are critical to our employees' success," said Anne-Marie Diouf, vice president of Human Resources at Symetra. "They're becoming even more important as we work tightly with our field staff to continue to strengthen our business."

People are speaking up, and they're doing so in a way that's courageous, tactful and far from limiting.

TIFFANY AUSTIN
Senior Internal Learning Consultant
Symetra

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GOALS

- Increase collaboration
- Prepare internal processors to speak up
- Bridge gaps between new and existing cultures

TACTICS

- Aligned Fierce principles with Symetra's "Rules of Engagement"
- Added Fierce Conversations to New Manager Onboarding
- Deployed tiered, cyclical learning strategy
- Redefined what development looks like

RESULTS

- Common language embedded in organization
- Intact teams aligning around goals
- New and long-term employees sharing knowledge and seeking out diverse perspectives



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2 PREPARE INTERNAL PROCESSORS TO SPEAK UP

"We need to encourage everyone—internal and external processors—to speak up and share what they know," said Tiffany Austin, senior internal learning consultant at Symetra and its Fierce program leader. "We don't want to overlook important details, lose valuable knowledge or miss out on new opportunities."

3 BRIDGE GAPS BETWEEN NEW AND EXISTING CULTURES

"We've been around for 56 years," said Diouf. "We're young in terms of being a public company, but we have a robust repository of in-depth industry knowledge. We want to effectively tap into our long-term employees' wealth of information and experience and encourage input from new staff members, since the best decisions are made collectively."



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ANNE-MARIE DIOUF
Vice President of Human Resources
Symetra

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“Fierce shows our people
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TIFFANY AUSTIN
Senior Internal Learning Consultant
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Tactics

1 ALIGNED FIERCE PRINCIPLES WITH SYMETRA'S "RULES OF ENGAGEMENT"

The first step was to pilot Fierce Conversations with Symetra's executive team. The hands-on nature of Fierce workshops and tools helped illustrate how they could support Symetra's "Rules of Engagement."

"It's one thing to say 'be accountable for your behavior and results' and another to give people the tools to do it," said Austin. "Fierce shows our employees what accountability conversations look like."

Workshops include a mapping exercise so participants continue to make the connection between Fierce principles and the "Rules of Engagement." While there's no one right answer, the exercise ensures the initiatives stay top-of-mind and helps participants engage directly with the material.

2 ADDED FIERCE CONVERSATIONS TO NEW MANAGER ONBOARDING

Next, the Symetra HR team added Fierce Conversations to its manager onboarding program. This not only sets expectations early on, it also provides concrete, easy-to-use and shared models for respectful **CONFRONTATION**, **COACHING**, **DELEGATION** and **TEAM** conversations.

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3 DEPLOYED TIERED, CYCLICAL LEARNING STRATEGY

Workshops are introduced in a tiered fashion. Ideally, managers of others are the first audience, followed by the general employee population. This way the language is familiar, and managers are prepared to answer questions and support learning.

Because reflection and practice are critical to the learning process, Symetra's Fierce learners revisit the foundation each time they move into a new model.

4 REDEFINED WHAT DEVELOPMENT LOOKS LIKE

"When most people think of professional development, they think of taking a class," said Marien Diaz, vice president of Benefit Claims. "It's so much more than that."

One way Symetra expands the concept of development is by using its Fierce graduates as coaches and facilitators. Participants solidify their own learning and broaden their skillset while helping others learn.

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MARIEN DIAZ
Vice President of Benefit Claims
Symetra

Results

"Fierce is now embedded in our organization," said Austin. "People are speaking up, and they're doing so in a way that's courageous, tactful and far from limiting. Employees who haven't yet been through the program hear the 'buzz' about Fierce and want to know how they can get started."

Internal teams are also reporting a shift in the way people communicate. "The coaching module helps our teams support each other in a new way," said Diaz. "We're doing more listening and giving less advice."

Open-enrollment workshops are popular and well attended. After attending, managers frequently request the workshop for their intact teams as a strategy to ensure everyone is aligned and moving toward the same goals.

New and long-term employees are becoming more open about sharing knowledge and more curious about uncovering different perspectives. Feedback is no longer only a top-down expectation. Open communication between peers, among intact teams and across departments is becoming the new expectation.

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Next Steps

"Skills like **COLLABORATION**, **CONFRONTATION**, and **ACCOUNTABILITY** are not boxes to check. They're never mastered completely. They're things we continually work on and strive to improve," said Diouf.

Fridays at Symetra have become "Fierce Fridays." The HR team is planning to add "Fierce Labs" as a key sustainability strategy to help learners reinforce, practice and apply new skills.

The HR team will also visit graduates—sitting in on team meetings and offering encouragement as new leaders facilitate inclusive think tanks.

A photograph of a woman with blonde hair tied back, wearing a yellow life vest over a purple shirt, kayaking on a river. She is seen from behind, paddling with a white paddle. The river is surrounded by lush green trees and mountains in the background.

“Fierce has given us both the ‘permission’ and the tools we need. The quality of conversations is improving and leading to innovation and change.”

TIFFANY AUSTIN
Senior Internal Learning Consultant
Symetra

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Conclusion

“Changing established behaviors within a company requires new ways of doing and being,” said Austin. “Fierce has given us both the ‘permission’ and the tools we need. The quality of conversations is improving and leading to innovation and change.”

Symetra will continue its shift to a more participatory culture—where people are prepared to speak up and ready to listen. The most important part? **Everyone is invited to the conversation.**

*The **coaching module** helps our teams support each other in a new way. We’re doing more listening and giving less advice.*

MARIEN DIAZ
Vice President of Benefit Claims
Symetra

add fierce to your training toolkit

Our diverse, global client list underscores a basic truth: Business is fundamentally an extended conversation—with colleagues, customers and the unknown future emerging around us. Whether your focus is on implementing key initiatives, managing top talent, improving customer acquisition and retention, developing leaders, or simply igniting productive dialogue that generates clarity and impetus for change—success occurs one conversation at a time.

For more information about how Fierce can help your business, visit fierceinc.com or contact us at 206.787.1100.

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