

Hormel Drives Engagement Across Its Workforce by Investing in Leadership Training

Background

Hormel Foods is a lot more than its iconic Spam products. With annual sales of \$11.9 billion, the company now owns diverse food brands including Skippy peanut butter, Columbus craft meats, and Wholly Guacamole dip. Over its 130-year history, Hormel Foods has grown exponentially. To maintain that growth, the global branded food company needed to leverage the experience and expertise of its people to innovate.

Challenges

Hormel Foods has been making bold moves to keep pace with the fast-evolving food industry and the changing eating patterns of its consumers. Amid the rise of trends like online grocery shopping and consumer demand for healthier options, Hormel Foods has been acquiring new brands while innovating its legacy brands, relying more on data analytics and hiring talent from outside the company to acquire new expertise.

As part of this evolution, the company's retail sales division decided to turn its one-week emerging leaders training into a 12-month program. By providing more robust training, Hormel hoped to turn its high performers into strong leaders faster.

"We knew they had successful sales careers and good technical capabilities," says Allix Braun, who leads talent development for the company's retail sales division. "It was our job to help them grow from being a strong individual contributor to becoming a good manager."

To spark greater innovation, Hormel's retail division needed to teach its sales managers how to tap into the increasingly diverse backgrounds, knowledge and experience of its workforce. By soliciting input from employees at all levels of the organization – from millennials to boomers, sales representatives to data analysts, and newcomers to 40-year veterans – the new sales leaders could more readily develop and coach the sales skills their teams need to bring the company's products to the shelves and satisfy the rising demands of consumers.

"We're big believers in diversity of thought," Braun says. "We want to make sure that everyone feels comfortable sharing their opinions because those viewpoints will vary based on things like how you shopped growing up, whether you buy your groceries online and how you're used to working with customers."

— Talent Strategist, Hormel Foods



About Hormel

Industry: Food Processing & Manufacturing

Team Size: 400+ managers across retail division

Audience: New and developing sales leaders

Training Strategy

Challenge: Equipping new sales management with the tools to lead diverse teams effectively.

Objective: Expand a one-week emerging leaders training into a comprehensive 12-month program that prepares managers to give constructive feedback, coach effectively, delegate responsibilities, and manage team dynamics for stronger collaboration.

Outcomes

- 1) More focused and inclusive meetings that amplify every team member's perspective
- 2) Stronger collaboration across roles and levels, fostering innovation and trust
- 3) Plans are already in motion to expand the training program to other divisions



a fierce case study

Solutions

To help its new sales managers encourage greater collaboration, Hormel's retail division adopted a new approach to conversations. During the 12-month emerging leaders program, managers received training in new, more effective ways to provide feedback, coach, delegate and manage team dynamics.

One aspect of the training that's been particularly helpful is the "beach ball" approach to meetings. This concept encourages employees to view their organization as a multi-colored beach ball with each employee standing on different colored stripes depending on their job function and seniority level. Because of their unique vantage point (or stripe), each person's approach to business issues will differ in meaningful ways. By drawing out and discussing these differences, sales leaders can gain a broader perspective about the challenges they are facing.

"One of the things we talk about in training is that the beach ball helps us make sure that every person contributes their perspective and that every perspective is valued," Braun says.

Now when Hormel Foods sales managers call a team meeting, they email the participants a description of the issue they want to discuss and why it's important. During the meeting, everyone is expected to share their thoughts on proposed solutions. At the end of the discussion, attendees write down the solution they like best on index cards so the manager can use the input to make the final decision.



"Not only is every perspective shared, but we can also build off of each other's perspectives. That's where you see our inclusive, collaborative model come to life."

— **Talent Strategist, Hormel Foods**

Results

More than 400 people in Hormel's retail sales division have gone through the conversations training. As a result, meetings have become more focused and inclusive. At a recent directors' meeting, the customer account leaders met with the executive team to discuss a major change in strategy. Using the beach ball method, every leader had the opportunity to share their perspective regardless of whether they served large customers or small, regional ones.

"We were all sharing our perspectives and building off of each other," Braun says.

Evidence of its impact has been overwhelmingly positive. Emerging sales leaders who've been through the program call it "the best training they've ever had," Braun says. One claims it was better training than his master's degree program.

Because of the training's popularity, Hormel Foods has developed plans to roll it out to its other divisions. And no one in senior management is questioning the investment. In fact, Braun says, they are asking, "How can we get this to more people faster?"

Conclusion

Hormel Foods' targeted leadership training for management—focused on feedback, coaching, delegation, and managing team dynamics has led to more inclusive, innovative, and engaged teams. By investing in leadership development that values shared perspectives, Hormel is expanding this transformative approach across divisions to drive sustained success.