

How Coaching Empowered Women in a Corporate Culture

A Closer Look at Burton Snowboard's Coaching Program

In a male dominated corporate culture, coaching changed everything for Burton Snowboards. Employees at Burton, like Kyler Ronner-Blend, quickly recognized one thing, "There is value in coaching people." Ronner-Blend is one of 134 employees who went through a custom coaching training program initially aimed at empowering women. The program, which started with only a dozen people, sent a shock wave of energy through the company changing it from one of command and control, to one of collaboration and creativity.

It all started when Jake Burton Carpenter and Donna Carpenter, owners of Burton Snowboards, evaluated their company and realized there was a gaping hole. There were no women at the vice president or director level. So the Carpenters sought the help of The Coaching Center of Vermont. "Women were not accessing the opportunities to grow and develop in their job," explained Liz Dallas, the Center's Executive Director. Lea Belair, the Center's Director of Coaching and Training, added, "They needed to find their voice." So Burton Snowboards and The Coaching Center of Vermont began a Women's Leadership Initiative with a dozen participants.

"We were looking for 'champions of change' and it created a title wave of buzz at Burton. Eventually the executives wanted in on the program," explains Belair. In all, 134 Burton employees went through the six-month leadership program that included ICF accredited coaching skills training material, individual leadership and performance coaching, group coaching, and practicum workshops among other things. Over the course of six years, Burton

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ABOVE: Lea Belair and Liz Dallas hold a photo of the first coaching group, which was a gift to Lea for the mentorship she provided to them in coach-to-coach support.

invested \$600,000 in the leadership coaching program and it showed.

The benefits were widespread from increasing productivity to improving morale. The turnover rates decreased dramatically. Belair commented that employees reported they stayed with the company longer specifically because of the coaching program.

Dallas added, "Women were ready for leadership." That was evident when internal promotions skyrocketed. 125 women received promotions, more than 12 women were promoted to manager positions, and nine women were promoted to directors. Women also gained industry-wide recognition for their honed leadership skills. Three employees were named Pioneering Women Award Winners, four were named Ascent Award Winners, and Donna Carpenter was named Action

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WATCH NOW! *The coaching culture from the employees at Burton Snowboards.*

Sports' Most Influential Woman by *Transworld Business Magazine*. Overall, Burton leaders were given the skills to inspire and empower their team while instilling a creative mindset, encouraging innovation and restoring passion.

However, the program didn't come without its challenges. Dallas explained their biggest struggle was getting "buy-in from the top." She added, "It was hard to get the program off the ground." But once they did, Burton employees were expressing heartfelt gratitude for the transformation. "Coaching has changed everything," said Kyler Ronner-Bland in customer service. "It's changed communication styles, its opened people up to setting goals and ... figuring out how to really meet them. It has helped people realize there is value in coaching other people." Employees also reported learning valuable new skills. John Thorborough, Director of Operation Sales explained it like this: "new tools to try on age-old problems." Thorborough added, "Coaching draws us back to the human-side of doing our job." Rachel Gaitin, a production engineer, added, "I can now listen on a whole new level,

mirror people's words and use their words to help my message resonate with them. The concept of matching agendas was completely new to me and it's amazingly powerful." Even employees at the manager-lever realized the company was getting a great return on investment. Chris Doyle, Manager R & D, said, "It's an investment that will pay off."

While Dallas and Belair were considered the "teachers" in this experience, they learned a lot too. The program helped them grow as coaches. "You have to be ready to constantly re-innovate." Dallas continued, "Move with what wants to happen and have the confidence to reevaluate and not follow a script. It paid off for us every time." Belair added, "Coaching skills are really important in rapid change companies."

"It's really a snapshot in time," explained Belair. This six year project improved the corporate culture at a fast-paced, rapidly-growing company. Dallas concluded, "It's an indication that the next generation is looking to coaching as a viable option."