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Course helps improve leadership skills

By **Dawn Pauli**, contributing writer

As manager of the IT Helpdesk, Andrea Tanner juggles up to 16 employees and dozens of new questions and problems each day.

But one of her biggest challenges is managing her staff, which includes a majority of short-term student employees.

"I had great employees who couldn't finish call tickets on time, so I would get involved and frustrate them. I gave other employees a task, assuming they could just run with it, but they would make mistakes and get upset about it," Tanner said.

Then Tanner heard about the two-day experiential Influential Leadership course, based on the concept that effective leadership occurs when the appropriate leadership style is matched to an individuals' development level on a specific goal or task.

"I enrolled in the course because managers always have room to improve their leadership skills," she said. "In the course, I learned that as a manager I have to manage tasks as well as people. I ask myself, 'Does this person need more direction, less direction, or do they simply need a confidence boost?'"

University Human Resources (UHR) offers the Influential Leadership course to OU staff who supervise employees or students.

"Strong leaders are required to lead the various initiatives represented in OU's 2010 profile," said Aldona Sonta, manager of professional development and training for UHR. "This program helps to build leaders who can work with staff to maximize the quality and quantity of work produced by learning to adapt their leadership style."

David Vartanian, director of internal audit, attended the Influential Leadership course in November.

"It's a fine line, knowing how much support and direction to give employees," he said. "You don't want to diminish their skills and micro-manage because they're professionals and are knowledgeable. But that doesn't mean they have the skills necessary to complete every task.

"I had a hands-off style of management and found that wasn't always most effective. Depending on the project, sometimes you need to be more helpful and hands-on."

UHR is planning to offer the program about three times per year until most eligible employees are trained. After that time, the program will be available annually for new leaders.

To date, 65 OU employees have completed the course.

Influential Leadership is based on the situational leadership model of Ken Blanchard and Paul Hersey, which is taught in businesses throughout the United States. Julie Kowalski, principal of Creative Partnerships Inc. and an OU alumni, created and teaches the program at OU.

During the course, attendees learn how directive and supportive behaviors impact their effectiveness and how to direct employees to gain a clear understanding of a new task. Managers also learn how to coach employees in developing new competencies with confidence.

"The course was fabulous," Vartanian said. "Not only did I learn my leadership style, but the course taught me how to understand and work with my employees' strengths and weaknesses to make them more productive in a very positive manner. It was time well spent."

For more information about the Influential Leadership course, contact Aldona Sonta at sonta@oakland.edu or at (248) 370-4951.

SUMMARY

University Human Resources (UHR) is offering the Influential Leadership course to OU staff who supervise employees or students. The two-day experiential course is based on the concept that effective leadership occurs when the appropriate leadership style is matched to an individuals' development level on a specific goal or task.

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