



Wendy Greeson

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Leadership Excellence Rank

Best Sales Leadership Program
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Leadership Excellence Rank

Best Experienced / Senior Leader Program
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Leadership Excellence Rank

Best Global / International Leadership Program

Aligning Culture with Growth

Our editorial team interviewed **Wendy Greeson** from **Arthur J. Gallagher & Co** at the **Leadership Excellence Awards** this past February. Here are some excerpts from the exclusive interview.



Company Name: Arthur J. Gallagher & Co
Program Name: Breakthrough Leadership Program

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What are the overall objectives of the program curriculum?

Arthur J. Gallagher & Co.'s business success is built on a strong foundation of shared values and cultural attributes, which were established by the company's founders and are still championed today. The company is recognized for its sales and marketing strength, client focus, team approach and entrepreneurial spirit. Partnering with Harvard Business Publishing, Breakthrough Leadership has been fully customized to ensure alignment with Gallagher's culture.

The program focuses on three leadership imperatives: managing yourself, managing your network, and managing your team. The blended learning architecture seamlessly connects live events, webinars, the online learning portal and on-the-job activities. Ultimately, the curriculum helps participants become more effective in their leadership role.

At the end of 2009, Gallagher had 9,840 employees. Since 2010, Gallagher has acquired more than 250 companies. With its aggressive acquisition strategy and a current employee population exceeding 21,500, the company anticipates strong continued growth over the next decade. As Gallagher continues to grow, it is critical that the company strengthens its succession and talent pipeline.

Breakthrough Leadership is designed to produce the following outcomes:

- The building of relationships across lines of business
- Cross-divisional collaboration
- Cross-selling opportunities
- Enhanced leadership skills that prepare Branch Managers for future growth
- A strengthened succession and talent pipeline
- A deeper understanding throughout the organization that the development of our leaders is critical to our growth and success

Who do you impact with your program?

Focusing on mid to senior leaders, Breakthrough Leadership is a global program. Top performers are selected to participate by their division leaders during the annual talent review and succession planning process.

At Gallagher, leaders must be able to successfully build and maintain relationships. Therefore, the curriculum focuses on networking, influencing others, improving communication, building trust and developing others (giving feedback, delegating and coaching). Each Breakthrough Leadership cohort consists of fifty participants and six executive sponsors.

Throughout the program, participants identify specific development opportunities, create and implement an action plan, and then report outcomes to their study group. This approach helps participants maintain accountability to themselves and their peers.

The executive sponsors are division leaders who serve as mentors throughout the program. They attend the instructor-led kickoff alongside participants, participate in study group meetings, help facilitate webinars, and ensure that the content and discussions are closely connected to company priorities.

Gallagher's CEO opens the two-day kickoff event by explaining to participants how this program supports the company's strategic vision. To help participants develop a greater sense of self-awareness, a DiSC workshop follows the CEO's opening remarks. This workshop accelerates their ability to build relationships with their study group team members and executive sponsor. Additionally, the CEO hosts a dinner the last night of the kickoff to provide participants with the opportunity to network with Gallagher's leadership team.

What are the lessons you've learned this year from facilitating your program?

This program was introduced to the organization in April 2013, with the majority of lessons learned taking place that first year. We started with three cohorts who were staggered, each a month apart. This allowed us to quickly implement changes and make additional enhancements to the program.

In addition to conducting online formal feedback surveys at the end of each module and the program, we regularly reach out one-on-one to participants and executive sponsors to solicit their input. We are able to access valuable insight throughout the program by creating this high-touch feedback process.

While the feedback received focuses mainly on small changes to the program, the impact of implementing those changes has been significant. We believe this has had an overall positive impact on participant engagement.

How do you measure the return on investment and success of the program?

Based on feedback received from participants, this program has become a well-regarded development opportunity and the prospect

of participating is highly coveted. Of the 221 employees who have completed the program, 46% have been promoted, made a lateral move or taken on additional responsibilities.

Supporting the significant uptick in promotions, lateral moves and increased responsibilities, 94% of all participants say the program has provided them with insights that positively impact the way they approach their jobs. Additionally, 95% indicate that the program has helped them become more effective leaders.

The program also provides the CEO, senior leadership team and executive sponsors with a direct line of sight to Gallagher's emerging top talent. With a high-level of executive participation and support throughout, the company has achieved a 90% retention rate among 2013 & 2014 participants. This has enabled Gallagher to establish and maintain a solid talent pipeline for mid to senior-level leaders.

What lies ahead for the program and how it will continue to succeed?

At the end of the program, Gallagher introduces participants to new resources that will help them focus on continuing their leadership journey. By leveraging the work of Marshall Goldsmith's "What Got You Here Won't Get You There," an additional webinar was added to Breakthrough Leadership to help participants focus on how they will continue to grow as leaders.

Upon completing Breakthrough Leadership, participants are given the opportunity to take part in the Targeted Development Program. Using an assessment tool based on Gallagher's global leadership competencies, they each work independently with their manager to identify their top two developmental needs. A detailed action plan is then created with the help of an Individual Development Planning Advisor.

Gallagher's Executive Coaching Program is also a potential next step, as over 52% of all Executive Coaching participants to-date are former Breakthrough Leadership participants and/or executive sponsors. With a greater level of one-on-one support than Targeted Development, this program also focuses on individual development.

Leveraging the blended learning structure in the Breakthrough Leadership Program, Gallagher has created a new front-line leader program which was rolled out in April 2015. Leadership Essentials is a six-month program that begins with a two-day instructor-led kickoff, followed by a series of monthly webinars. The feedback received to-date has been extremely positive.

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