

“Next Gen” Development:

How Leadership Coaching accelerates Talent development and the succession pipeline at Bell



Pictured left to right:
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Founded in 1880, Bell Canada has steadily grown to become the largest provider of Telecommunications services to the Canadian marketplace. Currently, Bell employs over 55,000 people across Canada.

Traditionally, Bell’s approach to leadership development was a “broad brush” approach which primarily relied on managers partnering with the Bell HR team to identify high potential team members. These high potentials would then be provided with 360 feedback and leadership coaching to build areas of strength and close key development

gaps. In 2010, as Bell’s business environment and strategy began to shift, the need to explore alternative development initiatives became critically important. With the increasingly competitive realities of Bell’s market environment, a more targeted, focused and rigorous approach to talent development was sought.

The Strategy

Centralized in the Corporate Organizational Development team, Bell’s senior OD leaders set out to understand how they could successfully prepare the company’s high potential Directors for strategic lateral career moves or full promotions into Vice President roles. This initiative would proactively build Bell’s leadership pipeline, support the succession of the next generation of leaders across its various business units and mitigate the performance risks that can underline transitions into bigger and more crucial roles.

Given the importance of such an initiative to the organization’s future leadership capability, Bell’s Senior OD leaders engaged

in a comprehensive search to find the best-suited partner for the implementation and execution of the new program. They opted to partner with Lee Hecht Harrison-Knightsbridge, one of North America's premier Human Capital Consulting firms, one with deep expertise in leadership development, executive coaching and business strategy.

Together, Lee Hecht Harrison-Knightsbridge and Bell created a comprehensive leadership coaching initiative that continues to support the development of the company's next generation of leaders.

As part of the High Potential Development Program, each of Bell's "Next Gen" Directors is paired with a Lee Hecht Harrison-Knightsbridge executive coach best suited to address their leadership needs. Two options for coaching support are presented to "Next Gen" leaders. To support leaders either new to their current role or immediately transitioning into a different position, 1:1 executive coaching is offered with a Lee Hecht Harrison-Knightsbridge Coach. For leaders well established in current roles and requiring a developmental stretch, coaching includes 1:1 executive coaching as well as coaching observational feedback opportunities.

A series of check-ins with the "Next Gen" leader, the Manager of the Next Gen leader, and the OD Team Coach are set up to evaluate the progress taking place in the development plan. This personalized approach that aimed to accelerate leadership self-awareness has proven to be integral to the success and longevity of the program.

The Results

Since the "Next Gen" program's initial implementation in 2010, more than 100 Bell employees from across Canada have been coached by Lee Hecht Harrison-Knightsbridge coaches, and the program's impact has been felt across all of Bell's business units. Bell has seen that 50% of the Directors who were involved with "Next Gen" successfully transitioned into new key strategic positions and 80% of new Vice President positions were filled through internal promotions from the Director level.

In 2014, an internal engagement survey of managers that measured the perceived leadership capacity of upper level leaders (including leader capability, communication, team effectiveness and goal alignment) increased by 4 percentage points to 84% since 2010. Engagement at the senior manager level also increased by 3 percentage points since 2013, as these managers perceived stronger support from upper level leadership in promoting internal career growth. General confidence in Bell's senior leadership team across the organization also jumped by 16 percentage points since 2010.

The "Next Gen" program has led the organization to fully embrace a coaching culture. Given the results of Bell's strong partnership with Lee Hecht Harrison-Knightsbridge, Bell continues to innovate in the way it develops talent, and leadership coaching remains a cornerstone that supports its leadership pipeline.

Congratulations, Bell!

ICF-Toronto Coaches was founded in 1999 to promote awareness and public recognition of the value and positive impact of coaching, and cultivates a collaborative, inclusive community for Greater Toronto Area coaches from all schools and traditions. It is one of the five leading international chapters and the home of the PRISM Award, launched in 2001 and then adopted by the ICF Global in 2005.



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