



VersaCold uses the MBTI® tool to turn insight into inspiration in their global leadership program

If you've ever bought frozen food, chances are you've been an indirect customer of either Americold or VersaCold. From processing, freezing and storage to inventory management and distribution, the world's largest cold-storage network handles logistics on a global scale. But some of its most important work is still happening in Canada, where VersaCold started 65 years ago.

Sam Smith, a learning and development specialist in VersaCold's Vancouver office, oversees the company's global leadership program for employees. Designed for managers, supervisors and high-potential employees, the year-long program has three phases: one-on-one coaching sessions using Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) tools, a full curriculum of online courses, and a regional graduation workshop for participants to share what they've learned and how they've used that knowledge back in their workplace.

The program's comprehensiveness is the result of foresight in an environment of constant expansion and consolidation. "Operations management executives and HR got together [in 2003] and asked what they wanted in leadership," says Smith. "We looked at the skill sets of leaders, and created an internal development program to build our bench strengths."

Smith says the biggest challenges for leaders in such a geographically dispersed conglomerate are delegation, teamwork and conflict resolution—all of which she sees as aspects of communication. To help up-and-coming leaders meet these challenges, the coaching phase includes personality type assessments using the MBTI Step II™ tool. "The MBTI assessment addresses our big need for communication," says Smith.

The coaching phase also includes a session with each participant's manager, to explore their working relationship. "The managers also take an MBTI assessment," says Smith. "The advantage of the MBTI tool is that it helps them with self-awareness and what changes they could make. It's easy to get buy-in from managers when they see the process."

With more than 300 graduates since 2006 and 107 participants in 2011, a key to the program's success is followup. Smith makes check-up calls to participants at the halfway point to discuss what they've learned about their personal preferences and how to apply it to any leadership barriers or challenges they're working on.

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Smith also attends the graduation workshops, so she sees participants give presentations on their progress toward the goals they had set during enrolment. "There's a lot to the leadership program; we want to see how they put it all together," she says.

Smith says a highlight of the program for most participants is knowing their personality type and using that knowledge to work better with peers and supervisors. She notes that some participants have turned insight into inspiration: "One participant talked about working in a unionized environment, and was working with the coach on a leadership style that was about influence, not control. Another told us that, because of the program, they were taking more time to express gratitude to people for work done day to day. It's made this person more visible to the people in their team."

Because participants' managers are also at the workshops, Smith gets their feedback to help her evaluate the program. "We ask them whether they've seen improvement," she says. "There's unanimous agreement. Attitudes are improved. People are more open, less resistant to change. People are more engaged."

Sam Smith

is a learning and development specialist with VersaCold Group. With a 25-year-plus career in warehousing and distribution, she ensures the successful annual implementation of the organization's leadership and performance management programs. She is an MBTI certified practitioner.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is available from Psychometrics Canada at www.psychometrics.com