
BSG & Ascend Partnership

2022

Overview

Rapidly scaling organizations are often faced with the dual challenge of recruiting top talent while simultaneously building professional training opportunities to develop and retain that talent. In short, the investment an organization makes in building the team extends beyond the quality of individual hires. It now becomes more essential than ever to support emerging leaders, managers and individual contributors by equipping them with fundamental skills that align with their roles and responsibilities as the company scales.

Why Ascend?

We wanted to build a company that could become a business partner for leaders and teams seeking to improve their own performance. We wanted to be able to deliver a meaningful and measurable return on investment in recruiting, coaching and leadership training. While many companies focus on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as a way to measure the health of their business, Ascend helps companies assess and improve their Key Leadership Indicators (KLIs) as an equally important metric to determine the effectiveness and success of their management teams.

Too often, leadership development is treated as an ancillary activity within organizations rather than as a business driver with a measurable ROI. Companies make significant investments in sourcing and identifying the best possible talent for their organizations but too often that investment is devalued without an aggressive and comprehensive plan for introducing, integrating and enabling the success of said recruited talent. Ascend focuses on leadership development from the perspective of operational executives who have direct experience and knowledge running organizations from many different industrial sectors and at every stage of growth.

The Opportunity

The demands of managers and emerging leaders are constantly in flux; particularly in rapidly growing organizations. Building a high performing team under any circumstances can be challenging; however, now more than ever it requires a common language, rules of engagement, ways to nurture collaboration and mitigate conflict.

Overall, organizations need to find the most effective ways to consistently build trust, accountability and empathy across multiple locations and diverse company roles.



Case Study 1

Integrating Acquired Talent

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Building and Belonging - The Pillars of Organizational Culture

Case Study 1

Integrating Acquired Talent

Company A is a rapidly growing, internet-based insurance company (\$4B valuation) providing a portfolio of small business insurance solutions to entrepreneurs and service trades.

Company A had recently acquired a smaller competitor with the intention of integrating domain expertise and new processes into the combined entity. The acquiring company is a “technology platform company” in the small business services space (including insurance). The company they purchased was successful in traditional business insurance sales with a lower valuation in the mid-hundred millions.

The overall business objective was to capitalize on the domain expertise of the acquired company to scale the combined organization as fast and efficiently as possible.

In reality, post integration these two teams could not have been less aligned in terms of how they set strategies, organized structurally, and managed to common goals.

Investors saw this acquisition as critical to achieving the goal of a technology-centered (“disruptive”) insurance solution as a gateway to follow-on product offerings for entrepreneurs and small businesses in a variety of adjacent areas including finance and legal services.

Executive leadership quickly realized that the focus on broad strategic alignment (that had driven the sales diligence process) was of no help in getting these two siloed organizations to integrate successfully and work collaboratively.

Additionally, the acquisition doubled the size of the executive staff and inadvertently created a chasm between the C-Suite and the VP/Operating level of the company.

Company A’s COO engaged Ascend to design and implement a program that would accomplish the following;

- Connect the two organizations at an operating level and drive collaboration between the engineering (platform) and insurance (sales) silos
- Help the VP level executives establish their own collective (and individual) leadership voice in order to be effective driving the combined business.

Case Study 1

Integrating Acquired Talent

Ascend's Solution:

Leveraging Human Capital Program

This emerging leader intensive was a targeted leadership development program designed to provide select people managers with the techniques, mindset and network to enable themselves and others to thrive regardless of place. Equally important, this program established internal professional development and training led by the participating leaders with a "train the trainers" model for future members of the organization. This was the blueprint to build and grow a successful team in any functional area of responsibility.

Core to the implementation of this training was designing a 6-month VP leadership program to bring the VP leaders together as one cohort to address and work through the communication challenges and silos. Ascend identified this layer of the organization as most critical to full scale change within the company.

Ascend initiated a brief "discovery phase" to identify several critical and specific business objectives that were underperforming. In this case those two areas included 1) performance marketing directly to target customers vs. traditional marketing to independent insurance agents and 2) data driven market segmentation vs. traditional product bundling.

Ascend was able to build all training content to address a methodology to solve for these issues. Content relevant to the real business challenges increased participant engagement exponentially and provided measurable benchmarks for progress.

OUTCOME: At the completion of the program outcomes included a new organizational structure, new processes for establishing ownership and accountability below the C-level, new roles of engagement for surfacing problems and identifying solutions across non-linear divisions of the company that had previously worked as discreet (competitive) silos.

Program Module Examples:

Finding and articulating your leadership voice and POV

Becoming a trusted advisor and thought leader with strategic speed

Fostering a new system of effective feedback loops

Alignment and clarity of roles & responsibilities on teams

How your leadership has to change as you scale

Developing and executing vision and team culture within performance goal management and priorities

Case Study 2

Legacy Executives/Key New Hires: Critical Communication Skills

Company B is one of the largest commercial construction and management companies in the U.S with a private ownership structure and multimillion dollar revenues.

Company B has three distinct operating divisions that are all profitable (to varying degrees) with the key variances being between highest gross revenue in the largest division to highest profitability margins in the smallest division. Each of these divisions operates autonomously with an independent leader and minimal executive oversight.

Business units are further segmented between those that are primarily oriented around physical construction (legacy business drivers) and those that are primarily oriented around follow-on technology based maintenance services (profitability drivers).

Company B has been family managed for several generations and credits "company culture" as the most critical factor for growth and executive retention. More than 70% of the executive team have worked at Company B for the entirety of their careers. Company B is also in the process of active succession planning that will require continued leadership development for the next generation CEO.

Company B recruited several new senior executives with spectacular track records to run the emerging business units. These individuals gained traction quickly and experienced early success and management assumed the "on-boarding and integration" processes already in place had been equally successful.

Privately, *all* of the operating divisions started expressing frustrations and challenges to the CEO who was ill-equipped to actively manage the relationships between his senior people.

The company's first attempt to resolve these issues was to hire a seasoned HR executive but all agreed that roadblocks were increasing and overall company performance was decreasing. That same HR executive had previous experience with Ascend and reached out for help.

Case Study 2

Legacy Executives/Key New Hires: Critical Communication Skills

Ascend's Solution:

Translational Communication Leadership Program

Company B's approach to building a high performing team had previously been anchored in the development and long-term retention of executives promoted within the organization over an extended period of time. These individuals learned the way of doing "all things Company B" organically without formal training.

However, everyone in Company B acknowledged that new people and new ideas were essential to continued growth. Ascend's primary challenge was to respect and leverage what worked with the best of legacy communication practices while creating new ways for all of the executives (regardless of tenure) to actively build trust and foster necessary collaboration. This program emphasized all facets of strategic and effective leadership communication.

OUTCOME:

This program was rated at a "very high value" during engagement with Ascend. Root issues surfaced concerning assumptions surrounding the succession planning process, fear of change from executives who were comfortable continuing to operate in ways that had previously served them well, and perceived threats to a management style anchored in being "people centric" vs. "performance centric."

These examples were all contributing to the collective management challenges. Providing a structured program to teach new communication techniques and establish collective rules of engagement mitigated internal threats from both the new and original senior leaders. Ascend continues an executive coaching relationship with Company B.

Program Module Examples:

Building Ongoing & Active
Trust

Understanding Conflict
Management Styles

Leveraging Unique &
Different Leadership Styles

Disrupting the Operating in
Silos Model + Mindset

Developing Strategic
Thought Leadership
- Seeing the Big Picture

Case Study 3

Building and Belonging - The Pillars of Organizational Culture

Company C is an emerging leader in the athletic footwear and apparel sector featuring a celebrity founder. Company C is also minority-owned and led. This company has a passionate audience of core customers and extremely high awareness levels based on the reputation and related professional accomplishments of the founder.

Company C initially went “live” during the recent pandemic and drew enormous media attention at launch (including a cover of “TIME” magazine), but failed to convert awareness into promised revenue goals for investors. Further, the management team (relatively inexperienced) was subjected to regular scrutiny and engagement by both investors and the advisory board.

Company C was very successful attracting high-performing talent, however, multiple pivots in business strategy resulted in lower retention, divisional layoffs, poor morale and a non-existent people strategy for the future. Company C had promised recruits it would be a new kind of company focused on a fully diverse and equitable community culture.

This company engaged Ascend to help design and build the organization with a “DEI&B forward” culture based on shared values and a philosophy of radical recognition (recognizing, not complimenting, the contribution of their peers and teams so everyone’s work and performance is not only seen, but valued at the highest of levels).

They wanted to set an organizational tone of belonging, collaborative innovation and community-first mindset, with specific goals around building and developing the team, individual ownership, accountability and setting new team members up for success.

Case Study 3

Building and Belonging - The Pillars of Organizational Culture

Ascend's Solution:

Diversity, Inclusion and Wellness: Building & Integrating Belonging

We live in a world of bias; race, gender, age, culture and geography; all that play critical roles in defining how we perform in our professional lives. This program was designed to define and identify bias in ways that can be leveraged to improve the performance of the organization, teams and individuals. Perceptions and assumptions based on characteristics that did not impact job performance could devastate a team and have a detrimental impact on recruiting, retention and company morale.

Curriculum was tailored and taught to reflect Company C's values and emerging culture. This programming was designed to be highly customized, applying principles of psychological safety to organizational and teams' needs. It went beyond abstract theory in order to emphasize discussions on attitudes and behaviors with a focus on practical implementation of meaningful and effective skills. The objective was to enact a positive, inclusive culture of change at all levels of the organization.

OUTCOME:

Company C has subsequently reorganized and hired several new senior executives, who were screened on the basis of the key characteristics determined and agreed upon from the program.

Ascend has subsequently been retained by both Company C and their Board to continue providing support for executive leadership including executive performance reviews, leadership training and senior coaching.

Program Module Examples:

Differentiating Cultural
Norms & Institutional Bias

Creating and Sustaining an
Inclusive and Measurable
Organizational Culture

Fostering Psychological
Safety in the Workplace

Addressing the Intersection
of Inclusion, Diversity &
Belonging

Building Empathy &
Identifying Process to
Prioritize Mental Well Being