



Excursions

“Nothing is so well learned as that which is discovered.” - Socrates

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*Interviews and article
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(Part 1 of 2)

Contagious Leadership, Part 1

Through twelve years of collaboration with the North Carolina Institute for Public Health, Discovery Learning, Inc. has helped the Institute create and deliver industry-specific leadership development for its several programs. Two articles share this experience.

“The people who work in our public health industry face enormous problems, but they don’t have much money and they don’t have much leverage,” said Steve Orton, Ph.D., deputy director of the North Carolina Institute for Public Health and head of the Office of Executive Education. “And, they can’t solve the problems by themselves. They end up trying to bring people from around the community to a common table to solve community problems. That whole process is a huge leadership challenge, one for which most of these professionals were never trained. That’s where the Institute comes in. We offer superior leadership development training to public health professionals, and we assure that level of quality by partnering with Discovery Learning, as we have for 11 years, to make certain we have the most appropriate and effective assessment and simulations for our learners.”

The North Carolina Institute for Public Health invests heavily in developing the leadership capabilities of the thousands of public health professionals who work not only in the state and in the Southeast, but also around the country. Since 1998, the Institute and Discovery Learning, Inc. have collaborated extensively in creating and delivering high quality executive education simulations and assessments specially designed for leaders in that field. Continually learning from the experiences of the program participants, Discovery

Learning has customized some of its materials and techniques and has even created new ones to help the Institute deliver the best possible leadership development experience to its participants.

Difficult challenges

“As the saying goes, ‘Nothing is so common as thinking that you are special,’” Orton continued, “but Public Health really is different in important ways. First, this profession has grown up at the margins of many different fields. People come to it from other disciplines such as medicine, economics, environmental science, finance, and psychology, among others. Second, the field of concerns is so broad. These professionals are dealing with so many issues simultaneously including environment, infectious disease, behavior issues, smoking, drinking, injuries, violence, and more. Third, and this is a big one, public health is really a cottage industry. It is a host of tiny organizations spread across the country, county by county and district by district, all trying to do basically the same work without a lot of sharing of ideas among them. All these factors present professionals in the public health industry with substantial and difficult leadership challenges.”

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*Steve Orton, Deputy Director
NC Institute for Public Health*

North Carolina Institute for Public Health

In response to these challenges, the School of Public Health at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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created the NC Institute for Public Health (NCIPH) in 1999. The Institute brings together academics and practitioners to stimulate thinking about ways to improve public health. The School already offered one leadership program, the Southeast Public Health Leadership Institute (SEPHLI), and decided that NCIPH could develop additional programs to meet the educational needs of working professionals through its Office of Executive Education. Today, the Office of Executive Education offers several programs including the Management Academy for Public Health, Emerging Leaders in Public Health, and, of course, SEPHLI, as well as others.

Leadership Makes a Difference

“Leadership is not something that most of our participants study in school,” said Orton. “They have all pursued specific disciplines and many have earned advanced degrees. They progress in their careers until one day they discover that what they know about a technical discipline is not enough to help them succeed with their current responsibilities. They discover that what they really need is more knowledge about how to use themselves and their personality to affect the behavior of other people. That’s leadership; and, leadership is really the perfect skill and knowledge base to learn in an

executive education format. Our participants have already been in leadership roles and have faced



Public health professionals explore their decision-making skills and styles as individuals and as groups.

challenges and problems. When they come to our programs, they understand what leadership is about. They are ready to develop themselves.

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*- Lisa Harrison, Program Director
Southeast Public Health Leadership Institute*

professionals get better understandings of themselves. We want to help that leader turn that new perspective into a behavior change in themselves that creates change in the organization they are leading. We build our programs so they lead to some action items on the part of the

participants. We want to avoid just dumping a bunch of content in their heads and then waving goodbye. Our goal is to help these leaders make a measurable difference. We have done that successfully for more than a decade in our original program, SEPHLI, and with our newer programs as well.”

SEPHLI

“The Southeast Public Health Leadership Institute started 11 years ago,” said Lisa Harrison, program director. “It was the first leadership program offered and actually predates the formation of the North Carolina Institute for Public Health. Participants in our program come from North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, and Arkansas. The program is a yearlong series of both on-site, face-to-face sessions and online/conference call interactions. We concentrate on eight specific leadership competencies including Self-Awareness, Political and Social Change Strategies, Systems Thinking and Problem Solving, and Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts. Discovery Learning, helping in all these goal areas, has a significant impact in our program during the very first four-day, face-to-face session.”

Discovery Leadership Profile for Public Health

The challenge for most leaders in any field is to see themselves as others see them. For that reason, the SEPHLI program and



other NCIPH programs begin their first sessions by engaging participants in the Discovery Leadership Profile for Public Health. This is the opportunity for participants to get feedback from their subordinates, peers, and boss on certain behaviors critical to success as a leader.

“The feedback assessment and coaching are two components people really appreciate most,” said Orton. “Professionals don’t get this kind of information in the normal course of their work, in the day-to-day scramble, and it is difficult to make yourself go out and get it in a way that is useful and not colored with performance evaluation. But, our participants come to our leadership programs ready to reflect on themselves, to receive feedback on their leadership behaviors, and to look at ways to improve what they are doing. This feedback is really the best way to start off the process.”

“Getting feedback through the Discovery Leadership Profile for Public Health is one of the real highlights of the program,” added Harrison. “When we first started using the feedback experience, we relied on some 360 instruments that were for general business. They did not really match the leadership challenges our participants were facing. That’s when Discovery Learning undertook an extensive research project to create

an instrument specific to the public health profession. Working with public health professionals across the country, Discovery Learning identified the 15 leadership

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*- Steve Orton, Deputy Director
NC Institute for Public Health*

competencies that are critical to success in public health. They created 62 items used to measure behaviors relevant to those competencies. That extra effort on their part has made a big difference in the value of the feedback to our participants. In addition, Discovery Learning also provides professionals to coach our participants one-on-one as they review and interpret the feedback they receive. That one-on-one coaching is always regarded by graduating participants as one of the most valuable parts of the program. Discovery Learning also created a training segment to teach and promote peer-coaching skills so participants can support each other and take that technique back to their separate work places.” [See *Contagious Leadership, Part II: A Collaborative Effort.*]

Paper Planes, Inc.

“We use Discovery Learning’s Paper Planes, Inc. simulation during our first session together to great effect,” said Harrison. “It helps us accomplish some important things. First, of

course, the simulation is about systems thinking and collaboration, two competencies we emphasize. As well, the activity provides the participants a chance to get to know each other. For the purposes of the yearlong program, the participants are divided into groups which will interact throughout the year in person and online. This simulation gets everyone on a team acquainted. They learn about each other’s approaches to problem solving and how each of them looks at change. By the time we get to the training segment on Communications, these people are no longer strangers.”

“That simulation is about collaboration and how hand-offs happen,” added Orton. “It is particularly powerful for our participants who work for governments.

Those organizations are not usually very flexible. They are risk averse and they do not make wholesale changes very quickly because they usually work with many stakeholders and they are spending other people’s money. Paper Planes, Inc. really holds a mirror up to the culture of the organization. It’s almost humorous; people think they are acting differently, but they are actually playing out the roles and behaviors they use everyday at work. We are who we are. The simulation is excellent at revealing this fact and taking the learning to deeper levels as well.”

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Sharing real-world experiences is a benefit of the NCIPH programs.



Participants look for consensus in a group exercise.

Change Styles

“One of the things I like most about Discovery Learning’s approach,” continued Orton, “is how good they are at simplifying some pretty complicated concepts. They take it down to some simple vocabulary and some simple demonstrations, but it still has great depth and richness. Change Styles is a great example. Participants answer 22 questions and then see where they fall along a continuum with three powerful and easy-to-remember labels. And the labels really work. Our participants have real-world experience and they can immediately identify some relationships in their work lives that are affected by the differences in personality so easily explained as Change Styles. It’s just a nice, simple way to understand that data, and people can take it in lot of different directions. It’s useful and powerful.”

“We expand on the learning from the Change Style assessment in another segment,” added Harrison. “We arrange a conference call with Discovery Learning during our year together. Chris Musselewhite addresses Political and Social Change Strategies and talks from his book, *Dangerous Opportunity*. He goes beyond the Change Styles and talks about the Change Process model and how the paths people take through change are different for the three Change Styles. It is a fascinating part of the program that everyone mentions as so useful. They can immediately apply this new perspective to what they are doing at work.”

Decision Style Profile

“We use Decision Style Profile in the first get-together,” said Harrison. “This is another assessment that reveals to the participants the different ways that people think. They learn that everyone looking at the same situation does not necessarily agree on what approach is appropriate for arriving at a decision. It is a powerful eye-opener. Along with Discovery Leadership Profile for Public Health, Change Style Indicator, and some other assessments

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such as Myers-Briggs, Decision Style Profile adds to the participant’s self-knowledge. After that initial four-day session, they end up with quite a lot in their toolkits.”

Making a Difference

“We try to build our programs,” said Orton, “so that they lead to some action. In the SEPHLI program, for example, people are challenged to take on a project that takes them out of their comfort zone. It may be something they learned about themselves from the 360 instrument or from Change Styles, but they have to come up with a project that exercises that new discovery about themselves and connects to a community or project. In the

Management Academy program, the participants have to create a revenue-generating program and actually implement it. The idea is have them focus on addressing public health needs in their community by creating a sustainable, revenue-generating business. They may take all year or longer to complete it, but when they are done, they know they have made a positive impact in the community primarily through changes in how they see themselves as leaders.”

Leadership – a Tool

“I think the people who get the most out of the leadership education programs,” said Orton, “are the ones who come to it as if it were an oasis, an opportunity for them to get away and to do some reflecting and to learn about themselves as an instrument of leadership. The public health arena tends to attract life-long learners anyway,

people who are interested in looking at old problems in new ways and trying to expand their world of ideas. The people who will be successful in leading this profession in the future are those who understand themselves, understand others, and who can find within any challenge a great opportunity. These professionals see their leadership as an important tool they can bring to bear in helping the community improve its health and well-being. And improving public health is what this is all about.” ●