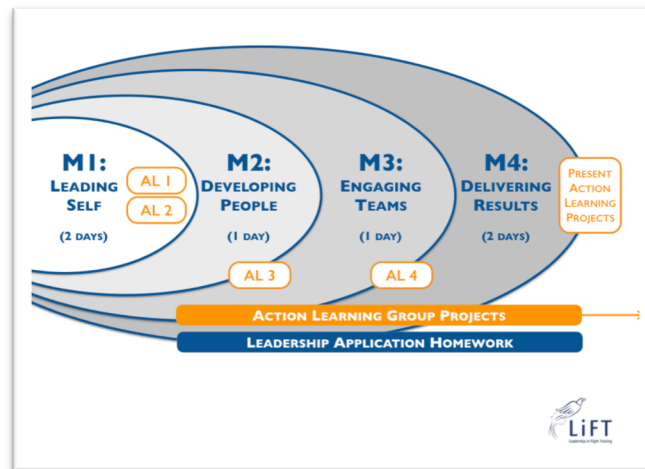


Nestlé Infant Nutrition Philippines' First Ever LiFT: Inspiring Change from Within

It wasn't just the millennial workforce, the volume of employees, or even the VUCA (volatile, unpredictable, complex, ambiguous) environment that presented the biggest challenge to Nestlé Infant Nutrition (NIN)'s Field Managers when they attended the first-ever Leadership in Flight Training (LiFT) — it was the lost art of asking questions.

Asking powerful and insightful questions was one of the key skill needed for the LiFT Program, centered on the Action Learning (AL) method. Brenda Labastida, Field Manager of Luzon says, it took her and her teammates two whole hours to warm-up enough to get the ball rolling.

“During the first meeting, we challenged ourselves just by asking questions, and we were not used to it. It was a struggle. It took two hours, we couldn't move on, we were all just deliberating to identify the problem,” says Brenda. But she adds that once she and her team got the hang of the line of questioning, it set the tone for the entire program. “As we went on, we formed the habit. Once we had the right attitude of asking questions and listening, from there, the insight was delivered,” she says.



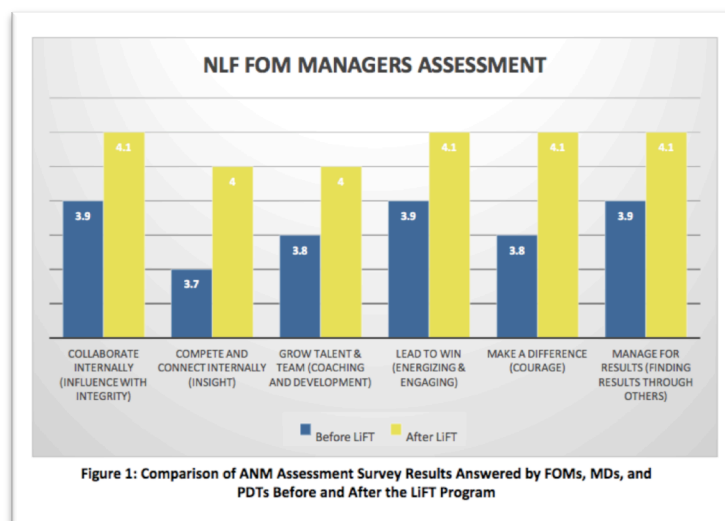
NIN's LiFT Program was spread out into four learning modules over several months, with Action Learning carefully embedded across the entire program

Brenda and her team were part of the Field Managers that underwent the LiFT program by consultancy firm Management Strategies. The aim was to address what the company deemed a growing need for stronger leaders and coaches in the field. This was after an internal coaching effectiveness survey revealed that while Field Managers scored highest on energy and passion to win, they scored lowest on coaching and development to grow talents and teams.

And so, NIN found itself facing their VUCA reality: a more competitive environment, not just in product development in the medical industry, but also in employee retention. Reyza Paz-Santos, Field Manager for Visayas, felt the latter when she was transferred to

the region, from Luzon, “The attrition rate was high at that time. The team in Visayas has always been known as a team of high achievers, but when I came in, I noticed there was a lack of motivation. People were not as motivated as I thought they were.”

Management Strategies, a partner of Nestlé Philippines since 2002, spread out the four learning modules over several months, with Action Learning carefully embedded across the entire program. The first module was Leading Self, and Reyza says it was here that she immediately felt the difference—first in herself, and then her teammates: “My personality is dominant, so even when they just see me, my voice is already loud. I learned to make adjustments in the manner I talk. I catch myself at critical moments, now before saying a word, I now bother to ask questions. They see the effort from my end to really adjust and reach out,” she says.



IN NUMBERS: After the LiFT Program: Field Manager scored higher in all 6 success drivers of Nestlé

Management Strategies Partner and WIAL Senior Action Learning Coach Cristina Alafriz says that the AL projects were critical to the LiFT Program, with AL being a powerful tool to address their VUCA realities while developing the 6 leadership success drivers of Nestlé.

“If you look at the AL projects, it was meant to address the biggest challenges of the organization, which isn’t necessarily directly related to leadership. While this is a program focused on developing leaders, we also needed to make sure we covered a bigger scope to ensure application of the principles at work,” says Cristina.

Leo Castillo, Management Strategies Partner and WIAL Certified Action Learning Coach, adds, “For example for NIN: what is the objective to help the business, it wasn’t merely a program, or just an intervention, or just for the leader. How will the business benefit? Where will the business be years from now? It’s really understanding that,” he says.

For Melissa Ayson, NIN’s VP for Field Operations, the results after LiFT— from the AL projects in particular—were quantifiable: not only did coaching effectiveness scores improve, the manner of questioning in coaching also changed.

“Our coaching used to be very functional in nature, but after the LiFT Program, there is now more sincerity in the way they approach their team members. It’s more personalized in some way. There is also a stronger sense of accountability and responsibility for their team. In the way they raise issues and concerns, they know now they have the power to drive the resolution of the concerns,” Melissa says.

Months after the LiFT program, internal changes have been made to sustain the lessons learned, including the continuation of structured feedback sessions. New line managers are also slated to undergo the same program in the future.



L: Reyza Paz-Santos and NIN’s Visayas Team, R: Brenda Labastida and her LiFT notebook

But for Reyza and Brenda, the change runs deeper: “What stuck with us is the safer environment. If the environment is safe, we will have happy motivated workers. The reality is they will always have frustrations. There will always be bumps, but it can now be managed,” Reyza says.

Brenda keeps her LiFT notebook with her now wherever she goes. “I check on it. It really reminds me. We are persons in the process of improving and molding ourselves, and the only way to do that is to keep coming back to this,” she says.

Written by Michelle Orosa-Ople