



Attracting & Retaining Top Talent with a Custom Talent Development Program

Ranked one of the Top 100 Global Technology Leaders by Thomson Reuters, Sharp Electronics Corporation is recognized as one of the industry's most successful organizations. Sharp is a household name whose innovations—from the latest 8K professional displays and multifunction printers to network security services—have been improving lives for more than 100 years. But operating at the cutting edge of such a competitive market requires top talent at every level.

Upskilling for the Future

With the U.S. unemployment rate at its lowest in decades, it's a job seeker's market, and the war for talent is on. Sharp wanted an engaging and focused approach to employee development, and began to design a scalable program that would strengthen their talent bench, upskill new and existing employees, and help them fill open positions by incentivizing new-hire prospects with learning.

Prior to their partnership with the American Management Association (AMA), Sharp didn't have a formalized, structured program in place to effectively develop their high-potential employees and leaders. However, in 2018, Mike Marusic was promoted to president and CEO of Sharp Imaging and Information Company of America (the B2B arm of Sharp Electronics). He brought with him a renewed vision for how to take Sharp to the next level. One key change Marusic sought was a solid professional development program, spanning from onboarding to succession planning.

Armed with Marusic's vision, Matthew Martorano, Sharp's Training & Development Manager, began to design a professional development strategy that would bring the organization into the future. He was eager to launch quickly and began to search for a partner that offered customizable best-in-class training and the ability to engage various skill-levels of employees. The resulting program was a collaboration with AMA called Sharp University, Career Development—an intensive, year-long professional development curriculum designed to cultivate a learning environment for their high-potential employees. It also allowed their current leadership to practice and refine their abilities.

Partnering for Agility, Changing Behaviors

"When we were reviewing our options, AMA stood out not only because they're one of the most distinguished providers in the industry," says Martorano,

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Sharp and AMA Case Study



“but also because their solutions are specifically designed to change behaviors.” Together over the span of several months, they built multiple curricula consisting of 4-6 courses geared toward three levels of learners: high-potential staff, mid-level management, and executives.

Sharp’s L&D team met with AMA before every class to tailor it with specific examples and data to make the training more relevant to employees. “This extra attention to detail makes all the difference in how we’re accelerating changes in individual behaviors and attitudes, which in turn has positively impacted our corporate culture as a whole,” says Martorano. “Our approach has worked so effectively that it hasn’t felt like we’re working with an outside vendor. The planning and execution for each course has been fantastic.”

Results on the Job and Beyond

The first year, Sharp University’s results have been universally positive, with overall participant feedback averaging 88% in post-training surveys. “It’s evident that our high potentials value the investment we’re making in them,” shares Martorano, “and the initiative has led to some incredibly positive side effects.”

After the training, employees have proactively been asking how they can be considered for the next round of the program, and there’s been an uptick in promotions since it launched. “We’re proud to highlight that we’ve promoted nearly 100 people internally over the last year, or roughly 5% of our U.S. staff,” continues Martorano. “We’ve also started promoting Sharp University and our other development opportunities as a competitive incentive when attracting and retaining top talent.” Rather than struggle to find the perfect hire, Sharp can now confidently promote or hire someone who has the potential to shine but may need some polish.

Another exciting byproduct is that participants are taking it upon themselves to form smaller ecosystems, like resource groups, to strengthen the skills they learned in training. They are organically becoming more collaborative and more focused on the organization’s strategic challenges.

“I will say that each of the courses has given me a skill that I can immediately apply to my job as well as the opportunity to work more closely with the members of my cohort on a regular basis,” says Susan Osgood, vice president of Human Resources, the executive sponsor of the program as well as a participant. “We have a renewed sense of partnership from this learning opportunity.” This sense of comradery and renewed engagement has been energizing for the entire organization.

Now that the learning portion of the program has concluded, Sharp will assign the inaugural program’s final project. The learners will be divided into small groups to develop a formal plan for how to address various real-world business cases, which will then be presented to a board of senior executives. This final project refocuses all the things they’ve learned and provides an opportunity to showcase their newfound skills in front of Sharp’s leadership. The executive panel will choose the winning presentation, and the participants in that group will receive a substantial credit toward any training of their choice—even if it’s not directly related to their current role.

“We’re energized and looking forward to further cultivating our partnership with AMA,” says Martorano. “They’ve helped us to quickly and effectively kickstart Sharp University, and they’ve provided world-class talent development content, which has empowered us to recruit, retain and accelerate the best talent in the industry.”

