

L-R: David Vosvick, Vice President of Corporate HR and Strategic Staffing; LaNae Croxton, Director of Learning and Organizational Development



Shining Stars

Constellation Energy harnesses online resources and leadership guidance to light the path for employee learning and engagement.

According to LaNae Croxton, director of learning and organizational development for Constellation Energy, this publicly-traded energy company has always understood the value of developing its employees.

In recent years, however, the company has transformed its approach from mostly business-unit-based technical training into a strategic, enterprisewide approach. Facing increased retirements among its aging utility workforce, training and development was a critical component in Constellation Energy's recruitment and retention efforts.

"Employees want to work for an organization that values and invests in employee development," Croxton says.

Croxton joined the energy company in 2005. Her mandate for change, she says, was to achieve a close alignment among the businesses—which include electricity, nuclear energy, natural gas, and commodities trading—and to help meet their needs with learning and organizational development support.

While some learning and development professionals are embedded within the businesses to provide necessary safety, compliance, and technical training, Croxton

supervises a staff responsible for designing and implementing learning and development solutions that address the needs of the corporation.

These initiatives often are generated within advisory councils composed of senior business leaders. Constellation Energy uses these councils for guidance and oversight of key strategic programs, each of which has an executive sponsor.

The learning and organizational development team also plays a consulting role within the organization, immersing themselves in business issues and goals to determine the need for and nature of solutions. An annual enterprisewide needs assessment process helps to identify key learning needs and priorities.

With support and coaching from leaders, employees create individual development plans, and access online and classroom offerings through the company's "myDevelopment" portal. Constellation Energy conducts biannual employee engagement surveys to identify overall engagement levels and key drivers of engagement, and has found that the primary driver of employee engagement is career opportunities. Employee satisfaction with their career opportunities at Constellation Energy has increased by 9 percent in the last two years.

That may be because support for employee learning comes straight from the top. The company's Chief Information Officer and Chief Administrative Officer

“CEOs are always interested in the value of their investment, but it’s often difficult to generate an ROI equation. Changes in employee engagement, ongoing employee feedback, and low turnover lead us to believe that this is a pretty good place to work.”

—LaNae Croxton

Director of Learning and Organizational Development, Constellation Energy

Beth Perlman oversees the learning and organizational development function. She frequently speaks to employees about its importance and believes every Constellation Energy employee should receive at least 40 hours of learning annually (the actual company average is more than 56 hours).

“This is a great place to work in terms of leadership support and corporate investment of money and time,” says David Vosvick, vice president of corporate HR and strategic staffing.

A recent, successful initiative that broadened the impact of learning across the enterprise was developed in one of the business units, Constellation New Energy. New-hire sales training was created to provide an immersion into the company’s way of selling for 120 new sales representatives.

Launched earlier this year, the program features 30 hours of pre-work plus two weeks of classroom instruction that focuses on developing selling skills within the unique context of an energy company.

Participants learn about the issues facing their potential customers and learn models to help customers manage cost and risk over time. In a one-day lab session, participants prepare tools and materials to approach their target segments and engage in role-play activities that ensure the application of the newly

learned skills. On conclusion of the training, participants develop a personal implementation plan in conjunction with their managers.

“This is a great example of one business unit’s understanding of the importance of learning in today’s business environment,” says Croxton. “Previously, we had no standard sales methodology and no organized way to convey product knowledge other than on-the-job learning. The creation and rollout of this course has resulted in tremendous success for the organization.”

Croxton reports that the course has been wildly successful and is now spreading across other sales entities at Constellation Energy.

The company has recently taken proactive steps to close the knowledge transfer gap, implementing SharePoint, a new online resource center for project management, problem solving, and organizational change management.

The site was implemented in direct response to requests from employees in varying business units to have common templates, tools, and examples. It features intuitive and flexible navigation, relevant and fresh content, search capabilities, and sharing capability, and represents a single point of contact for employees on these topics.

Portal and document management applications are also integrated with wiki technology that enables true Web 2.0 collaboration and represents more than 90 percent of the content.

Initial measurement during the pilot phase generated activity charts that report on the most popular content, most active content, and most active contributors. In its first month, the site received more than 2,200 hits per day.

To link learning to individual and organizational performance, Constellation Energy uses strategic business planning and performance management and compensation processes.

During summer, the company begins its annual business planning process, which concludes in December with a revised five-year plan detailing enterprise and business-unit goals and objectives. The human resources plan, of which

the learning and organizational design plan is a part, is developed, ensuring that people development strategies are aligned with business strategies. Finally, individual development plans and goals are mutually established between employees and their direct supervisors.

Leaders are held accountable for developing their employees, Croxton notes. “While leaders are rated on a variety of competencies, one of particular interest is human capital management, which contains three parts—employee engagement, talent management, and diversity. Under our pay-for-performance system, part of a leader’s bonus is tied directly to the support of, and engagement in, learning and development.”

To ensure the sustainability of organizational results, Constellation Energy has partnered with the University of Virginia’s Darden School of Business to design and implement a two-week leadership development program for high-potential, mid-level leaders.

It is designed to enable those participants to address current and future business challenges, and addresses business strategy, finance and accounting, leadership development, and change management. A case-study methodology ensures that the content is relevant and meaningful, and community-based action learning projects give participants the opportunity to exercise their new skills while supporting Constellation Energy’s corporate social responsibility value.

Constellation Energy spends 2.86 percent of its payroll on employee learning and development, but it’s not always about the money, Croxton says. “CEOs are always interested in the value of their investment, but it’s often difficult to generate an ROI equation.

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