

# SOLUTIONS

## Star Achievement

### A Vendor-Provided Case Study

Schwan Foods builds world-class administrative assistants with Office Dynamics Ltd.



Las Vegas, Nevada

[officedynamicsltd.com](http://officedynamicsltd.com)

### Office Dynamics Ltd.

Office Dynamics Ltd. is a national leader in the development and presentation of sophisticated training programs that increase the productivity and level of professionalism in administrative and office support staff. In business since 1990, the company has worked with organizations ranging from small businesses to *Fortune* 500 firms, offering on-site programs, needs assessments, and one-on-one coaching, as well as working with executives to increase their effectiveness with their support staff.

Joe Curry, director of administration and development of Schwan's University, was convinced that world-class administrative support was essential to executive success. In conjunction with a focus on executive development, the Schwan Food Company wanted to make an investment in its administrative assistants.

Curry began by working with Schwan's Administrative Assistant Learning Council to determine the most important competencies for successful senior-level assistants. The council, made up of seven executive administrative assistants, created the Administrative Assistant Development Program and, after studying models for executive assistants, selected 29 key competencies. A competency assessment survey was developed and sent to each high-level executive and executive administrative assistant for completion. Curry then embarked on a search for a program that could provide quality training in a cost-effective manner consistent with an aggressive rollout schedule. After narrowing down to three potential vendors, conducting thorough discussions with clients, and personally getting acquainted with the suppliers, Curry chose Office Dynamics Ltd.—in particular, its Star Achievement Series, authored and taught by Joan Burge, founder and CEO of Office Dynamics Ltd., who worked in the administrative field for 20 years before founding her company in 1990.

The Star Achievement Series addressed 23 of the 29 competencies identified as necessary to excel in this profession; technical skills was covered by an in-house trainer. "It provided the best match in terms of addressing the competencies with high-quality facilitators, excellent materials, and extraordinary customer service," says Curry.

The series—a 12-part, tri-level, philos-

ophy-based curriculum—states, "You have the potential to be a star performer in your job. It takes a combination of the following:

- skill—enhancing current skills and building new ones
- attitude—achieving and maintaining a positive attitude about yourself, co-workers, managers, and customers
- team—building a variety of team relationships inside and outside the organization
- strategy—having an overall strategy for achieving professional excellence."

"If any one of those components isn't developed, an individual will not reach his or her full potential," says Burge. Each level in the series focuses on all four components. In level 1, participants spend an entire day focusing on topics related to such skills as executing successful meetings. They spend another full day on topics related to attitude, such as fighting "office dragons" (overcoming fear and intimidation), and a full day on team-related topics such as communicating with their managers. An additional day is spent on strategy-related topics such as goal setting, networking, and professional image.

The topics were designed to relate specifically to administrative support staff. The information presented in each module builds upon the previous module's content, growing in complexity.

The program is fast-paced, highly interactive, educational, and entertaining with themes, topics, and visual props that reinforce the concepts. Participants engage in role play, brainstorming, team competitions, demonstrations, and creative exercises—such as making a three-minute video "want ad" for a star-performing assistant.

Participants received comprehensive workbooks and a storage binder to keep

as a handy reference. At the end of each class, participants are asked two questions:

- What stood out for you today?
- What are you going to do differently back at your desk tomorrow?

Making a verbal public statement about how they were going to change behaviors encouraged participants to really think about why they had been in class, and it also created a support network among participants.

From the program's inception, Schwan's University leadership believed that involving the assistants' executives throughout in the educational process would be critical to the success of the program. Using the competency assessment survey, completed by the executive and his or her assistant, the pair create individual development plans that outline the steps to improve assistants' skills. The conversation that ensues between the executives and their assistants helps set expectations and encourages teamwork between assistants and executives.

An executive orientation session was held in February 2002, in which Burge gave an overview of the Star Achievement philosophy and outlined curriculum objectives and topics, changes the executives could expect to see in their assistants, and steps the executives would need to take to help their assistants be successful. It wasn't long after the program was implemented that changes were being made by the administrative assistants—and noticed by their executives.

## Results

Executives report assistants have enhanced capabilities and display the attitude and confidence to apply them to improve business results. The execs feel they're now able to delegate to their assistants many things they themselves used to do. The executives are more productive because of improved accuracy in such areas as meeting and travel planning, and in general office man-

agement. They have better working relationships with their assistants and now view them as valuable business partners.

In 2003, Schwan funded training for more than 504 administrative professionals. One participant says, "I look at problem solving in a new way. I utilize the techniques we learned when facing challenges...." Another says, "I've changed...

my belief in my abilities and potential. I realize that I *am* a professional...."

Because of Burge's background, participants know that the information comes from a highly-credible source with vast broad experience and knowledge of the profession. Burge has also sat on the other side of the desk since 1990, as an entrepreneur and executive. She can help assistants understand how they might be perceived by the management team, how to better build relationships with management, and why their executives do what they do.

Says Burge, "Schwan's University did an outstanding job from start to finish: identifying and measuring competencies, seeking out vendors, mapping a detailed time line, incorporating interim activities, working with the Administrative Assistant Learning Council, tying training to professional development plans, coordinating and rolling out the classes, planning and hosting graduation celebrations, conducting interim success measurements, and collecting post-class success stories.... During my 14 years of being in this business, I've never seen a more comprehensive approach to developing administrative and support staff. The team members at Schwan's University truly are star performers!"



**BEST Awards for more on Schwan (November 2003 T+D).**

*The Star Achievement Series® is a registered trademark. For more information on the program, call Office Dynamics Ltd., 800.STAR.139.*