



## Leaders Teaching Leaders Develops a Culture of Coaching and Business Skills at General Mills

### Overview

**Country or Region:** Worldwide  
**Industry:** Consumer Foods

#### Customer Profile

General Mills, the world's sixth largest food company, manufactures and markets branded, packaged consumer foods in more than 100 countries.

#### Business Situation

To successfully implement a new Holistic Margin Management initiative for better management of its cost structure, General Mills needed to improve the multifunctional business skills of its directors and develop coaching skills in its vice presidents.

#### Solution

TRI Corporation developed a unique two-tier leadership development experience directly mapped to General Mills' leadership competencies in which vice presidents acted as owner-coaches of simulation companies managed by directors.

#### Benefits

##### Directors

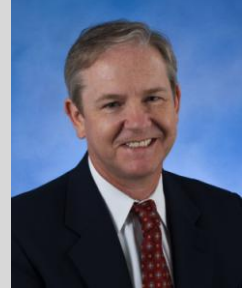
- ▶ Cross-functional and business acumen to create high-performance teams
- ▶ Understand strategies and tactics that grow shareholder value
- ▶ Innovative and critical thinking, complex decision-making
- ▶ Deliver an operational plan with ability to explain variances
- ▶ Understand relationship between decisions and results
- ▶ Use negotiation and communication for competitive advantage
- ▶ Coaching from and giving feedback to senior managers

##### Vice Presidents

- ▶ Learn and practice coaching skills
- ▶ Develop questioning, non-directive approach to guidance, business reviews
- ▶ Bring ideas and solutions forward from directors
- ▶ Accept upward feedback from directors

"TRI Corporation's program enabled us to enhance our directors' and vice presidents' skills and professional competencies. The program truly has been a champion for General Mills."

Kevin Wilde  
Chief Learning Officer



"The Company of Champions," General Mills markets some of the world's best-loved brands, including Betty Crocker, Häagen-Dazs, Pillsbury and Green Giant and is No. 1 or No. 2 in virtually every category in which it competes. General Mills recognizes the strong correlation between employee commitment and company performance, believing that "Championship People create Championship Results." In an industry continually challenged to lower its cost structure, the company saw the need to manage its margins more holistically and develop a stronger general management mindset in its directors. To accomplish this, General Mills vice presidents also needed to shift from a culture of direction to one of coaching that supports innovation and empowerment at all levels. General Mills' Chief Learning Officer (CLO) challenged TRI Corporation to design a development experience that engaged both groups. The result: an innovative, two-tiered experiential learning program that has been a showcase for developing high-level business and problem-solving skills across multiple levels of leadership.

### Situation

With a legacy of growing leaders from within, General Mills has laid a strong foundation of leadership development at based on linking development to business needs, involving line leaders, and creating an integrated framework with core systems across the company for high impact and value.

When a succession planning process highlighted business strategy as a development need and a Holistic Margin Management initiative pointed to the need for stronger general management skills, General Mills Chief Learning Officer (CLO) Kevin Wilde set out to create a program to address these critical gaps.

"Our objectives were two-fold," says Wilde, Chief Learning Officer magazine 2007 CLO of the Year. "We wanted to develop improved multifunctional business skills in our director population and coaching skills in our vice presidents."

General Mills had found that managers did not have sufficient understanding of all the levers they could use

to impact margins and hold their costs down. At the same time, both directors and vice presidents were accustomed to a directive culture that contributed to inefficiencies and lost productivity.

"We wanted to establish a culture of dialogue among vice presidents and directors," Wilde says. "We believed that more conversations and questioning would directly impact cost and yield new, innovative solutions."

As Wilde had successfully partnered with TRI Corporation on a premier leadership program at another Fortune 500 company, he chose them once again for General Mills.

"It was a natural for us to call on TRI Corporation as we planned a new program," Wilde says.

### For More Information

To learn more about how TRI Corporation experiential learning services can benefit your organization, visit [www.tri-simulation.com](http://www.tri-simulation.com), email [TRIContact@tri-simulation.com](mailto:TRIContact@tri-simulation.com) or call 408-656-2895.

For more information about General Mills and its brands, visit [www.generalmills.com](http://www.generalmills.com).

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Kevin Wilde  
Chief Learning Officer

"We worked to open a new communication dynamic between directors and officers."

Stephen Mercer  
TRI Corporation Senior Consultant

"The results are often surprising. An R&D scientist will often come up with a really smart marketing idea."

Steve Sanger  
Former CEO



TRI Corporation responded quickly with a business simulation based on a medical products company but explicitly designed to reinforce more than 30 different General Mills leadership behaviors in areas of integrity, leading innovation, delivering outstanding results and energizing and developing people.

In addition to customizing the simulation, TRI developed short vignettes on specific leadership challenges General Mills was interested in. For example, one tested participants' environmental sensitivity and crisis management skills.

"This approach took people out of their comfort zones and forced them to think strategically," Wilde says. "We were able to introduce specialized scenarios based on General Mills' business issues with a minimum of cost and effort."

"To think outside the box, you have to step outside the box," says Stephen Mercer, former CLO for Boeing and a TRI senior consultant working with General Mills. "Stepping into another industry helps you think clearly about your own."

"TRI doesn't customize to a business or industry but rather to a business situation or problem," Mercer says. "We put things in place based on the competencies to be developed."

## Benefits

"Building Great Leaders" enabled General Mills to increase the skills and competencies of its top management ranks. The live, interactive role play coupled with coaching sessions for officers provided a unique, realistic learning environment.

"Both our directors and vice presidents found the experience to be dynamic and rewarding," Wilde reports. "Several vice presidents have volunteered to participate in second and third programs, and alumni directors, those newly promoted to vice president, also have volunteered to participate in the next round."

Being forced to think outside their areas of expertise and to walk in another colleague's shoes, directors demonstrated new skills in knitting together multiple functions into high-performance teams.

In a Fortune magazine article that named General Mills a top ten company for leaders, former CEO Steve

One competency that most interested Wilde was coaching skills. He wanted to deeply involve officers with directors and provide multiple opportunities for them to practice and perfect giving and receiving feedback. To that end, TRI created a two-tiered "program within a program" that provided a common learning experience for both groups.

The result, "Building Great Leaders," is a three-day simulation program that focuses on the development of holistic business acumen for directors and officers. Participants confront challenges that replicate normal business problems -- from questionable strategic intent to negative cash flow, from missed commitments to lack of cross-functional awareness.

For each program, 36 managers came to General Mills' headquarters in Minneapolis and were divided into six multifunctional teams to compete against one another in running a business. Eight to ten officers served as coaches and owners of the teams' businesses.

Prior to the simulation, officer owners participated in coaching sessions on leading through questioning and were briefed on the simulation scenario. During the simulation, they welcomed their management teams set up the simulation, scheduled time for coaching on business and organizational issues, and participated in two operational reviews across an 18-month business cycle.

"We worked to open a new communication dynamic between directors and officers," Mercer says. "We encouraged them to be open and candid in their feedback and to ask and use questions throughout."

At the end of the simulation, teams were ranked on three criteria -- how much value they created for the original owner of the business, how well the business was positioned for the future, and how much additional value they generated for the employee pension plan.

Sanger said that the business understanding fostered by the TRI Corporation simulation experience had resulted in huge benefits. "The results are often surprising," he observed. "An R&D scientist will often come up with a really smart marketing idea."

And directors and vice presidents now have a shared learning experience to reflect on with a common understanding of business and communications practices to carry forward. Directors moving up in the company now take a coaching mentality with them.

"TRI Corporation's program enabled us to enhance our directors' and vice presidents' skills and professional competencies," Wilde says. "The program truly has been a champion for General Mills."