UNLOCKING STRENGTH WITH SOFT SKILLS

How we helped a nuclear propulsion developer advance their management capabilities
THE CLIENT

A company that develops advanced nuclear propulsion technology approached ASME L&D to raise the communication, management, and strategic thinking skills of their field engineers and help them realize their full potential.

Many engineering courses focus on technical training but overlook the integral value of soft skills development. An engineer can be highly proficient in technical know-how but if they are unable to communicate with clarity, influence stakeholders, or motivate teams consistently, their overall effectiveness is significantly diminished.

As new field engineers continue to join the company, there is an operational need for managers to be as effective as possible, as quickly as possible. Increasingly, this means focusing on soft skills and embedding the kinds of communication and problem-solving strategies that result in effective management and proactive engagement.

Having had mechanical engineers attend ASME L&D training in the past, the Operations Manager at this company recognized an opportunity during the COVID-19 pandemic to invest in upskilling their engineering managers and find out if virtual training could be as effective as in-person training.

“IN A WORLD WHERE RESOURCES ARE CONSTANTLY CONSTRAINED, IT’S IMPORTANT THAT YOU’RE GETTING GOOD COMMUNICATORS—AND THAT IS AN AREA WE REALLY NEEDED TO STRENGTHEN.”

Operations Manager
Our ‘Engineering Manager: Engaging Today’s Workforce and Strategic Thinking’ combo course covers a range of topics, including behavioral science concepts for managing and motivating people, and a mixture of standard and innovative game theory strategies.

With upwards of 60 engineers lined up for training, spread throughout the East Coast and Hawaii, we worked closely with the client to schedule a series of courses that would allow for participants in multiple time zones to join simultaneously.

Alongside the scheduling, we also customized our course content and delivery to incorporate specific phrases and acronyms that form the daily vocabulary of these engineers. This helped us to ground the concepts we were introducing with greater immediacy and relevance for the course participants.

Each course ran three consecutive days for groups of between 12 and 15. The classes were a mixture of lecture-based presentations and breakout sessions, where smaller groups were able to share and learn from each other’s experiences in relation to the techniques we introduced them to.

The client initially had doubts about how effective a ‘virtual classroom’ format would be—sitting in isolation in front of a computer screen can be a challenging way to learn. But after checking in early with each cohort, the Operations Manager was satisfied that everyone was not only highly engaged, but finding themselves reaching the ends of sessions without realizing that eight hours had passed.

“THE TECHNIQUES IN THIS COURSE DRIVE HOME THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ABLE TO COMMUNICATE ON A PERSONAL LEVEL AND ON A TECHNICAL LEVEL AS AN ENGINEER.”

Operations Manager
The outcome

In the past year, we have delivered this course to over 60 participants at this company, across multiple sessions, for both technical and non-technical employees. Uniformly, the feedback we’ve received is that it’s given everyone new skills and strategies that they can immediately take away and apply in their jobs.

Course participants expressed their pleasure at the pace of our classes. It’s easy for an 8-hour learning day to drag and new information lost through lack of meaningful engagement. But our instructor structured both the day and his delivery to keep energy high and everyone alert, without hitting information overload.

In terms of virtual learning, the client has now seen that it is just as effective as in-person training, and far more immediate. In the conversations we’ve since had about their future training requirements, they are looking at a mix of in-person and virtual courses.

As a company, they can see the difference that soft skills development makes. Many of their engineers now possess a robust set of tools to help them articulate problems and plans with shared clarity, and strategies for getting the best from colleagues. With future courses already being planned, they are committed to enhancing the soft skills capabilities of all their engineers.

“90% of our team has attended the course. It’s definitely something we’re interested in continuing.”

Engineering Manager
LET’S TALK

If you’d like to know what ASME L&D can do to level up your organization’s engineering teams, or if you have a specific course you’d like to talk to us about, get in touch:

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