

## **Intensive workshops often part of executive training**

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On a recent Wednesday, nearly two dozen Nashville businessmen and women were sprawled around a large living room, cash strewn on the floor in ones, fives, twenties, even a one hundred dollar bill.

The money was a payment for crimes committed, and by the end of the day, the group had collected \$1,200 for charity.

The “offenders” forced to pay up were part of the Signature Executive Program offered by the Scarlett Leadership Institute at Belmont University. Their crime was starting a sentence with a “no”, a “but” or a “however” – all negatives they were learning to delete from their conversations.

It was the third day of a week-long retreat at the Monteagle Inn about an hour and a half from Nashville. The participants, identified by their employers as possessing high growth potential, were there to develop leadership and life skills to become more effective managers.

The program costs \$9,500 and includes the five-day retreat with two-day follow up sessions every other month to focus on and reinforce new skills. Participating companies include some of Nashville’s most prominent corporations; HCA Inc., LifePoint Hospitals, Healthspring Inc., Louisiana Pacific Corp., Bridgestone/Firestone, Corrections Corporation of America, Caterpillar Financial Services, Genesco, Sun-Trust, BMI, Pinnacle Financial, Ingram Barge, and the Metropolitan Nashville Airport Authority.

Building supplies manufacturer LP, a longtime participant, typically sends one vice president each year. This year, it was Mike Blosser, vice president of environment, health and safety, who was recommended by LP CEO Rick Frost.

It’s a good opportunity to cross pollinate with peers outside our industries,” said Blosser, who has been with LP since 1999 and in the building industry since 1983. Blosser said the group included everyone from “financial folks to someone from Bush Beans” and said it had given him a broad base of new perspectives.

During the week, participants learned skills such as improving their presentations, a class taught by Mimi Bliss of Bliss communications, and handling situations with Doug Stone, author of the book , “ Difficult Conversations.”

Other speakers advised the group on more holistic topics, such as life balance, presented by Dr. Michael Hewitt, exercise physiologist at the Canyon Ranch spa, and coaching, taught by

Marshall Goldsmith, executive coach and author of the bestselling book “What Got You Here Won’t Get You There.”

Goldsmith’s advice focused on integrating personal and career development.

“Happiness and meaning at work and home ... people who find it in one find it the other,” he said, challenging participants to ask themselves daily questions:

What can I do to be a better boss, a better partner, a better parent?

Who do I need to apologize to?

Did I eat well today?

“Our default reaction in life is inertia. That’s how you hold yourself accountable,” he said.

The topic hit home with many of the executives. One participant, a new parent, became visibly emotional when Goldsmith broached the topic of guilt about time spent away from home. Others openly admitted they needed to focus more on their relationship with their spouse.

“The agenda was fantastic, but so was the group,” said Tara Alford, vice president/investment advisors executive at Fifth Third Bank. “Support from your own peers is incredible. We built great relationships and got to learn from each other. I walked away thinking how lucky I am to have spent a week with such talented individuals.”

Most participants agreed the biggest benefit was expanding their professional network to include peers in different industries, who could relate to their leadership challenges without arousing competition.

The women in the Scarlett program have bonded outside the planned activities, getting together for dinner, seeking out other female executives and creating a Facebook page.

And a big part of the Monteagle week was partnering with “peer coaches,” who will check in with each other weekly to hold each other accountable to the goals set during the retreat.

The program is offered by the Scarlett Leadership Institute, founded in 2006 by former Tractor Supply executive Joe Scarlett to fill what he saw was a void in business leadership. Scarlet designed the content with input from more than 30 local CEO’s.

“It is my observation and belief that long-term success in business is directly proportional to the quality of leadership,” he said.

And despite the poor economy, this year’s class is the programs largest.

Scarlett modeled his initiative on The Soderquist Center for Leadership and Ethics at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Ark., begun by his friend Don Soderquist, former vice chairman of Wal-Mart.

The Scarlett Institute also offers workshops for entrepreneurs, a peer-learning program for top executives, a corporate leadership development program, a certificate in meeting and event planning and a "Mini MBA" certificate, as well as custom programs for corporate clients.

Many executive education programs in Middle Tennessee are based at its major universities and overlap with graduate academic offerings in business fields.

Earlier this year, Lipscomb University launched its School of Executive Education to meet the changing needs of business in a flexible manner.

It hosted a three-day summer executive workshop series featuring advice geared toward managing through the recession from academics and CEOs. The school also offered a 13-week, Certificate in Accountancy program this summer to prepare recent graduates for careers as accountants. This fall, its offerings included courses in integrating environmental sustainability into business practices.

Vanderbilt University's Executive Development Institute offers short, focused executive programs that capture aspects of an MBA curriculum, as well custom corporate programs designed to tackle a specific management development need, group training initiative or strategic goal in a client's organization.

LP's Blosser said that during his career, he has been through many training programs but the Scarlett program has had a different impact. Now that he is back in the office, Blosser said he will speak regularly with an internal mentor at LP and talk weekly with his "peer coach" from Scarlett, holding each other accountable for progress toward their self-identified goals.

"What engaged me more than I thought it would was the breadth and depth of challenges we talked about," he said. "At times it was quite challenging. To sum the week up, it was very broad, very deep in a variety of areas that will help developing executives in any business."