

## **Research Results: Workforce Effectiveness**

**Industry:** Electric Utility

### **NEED**

Avid Learner, Inc. worked with one of the largest electric utility companies in the United States. The company serves nearly 7 million people in seven Midwestern states. At the time this development process was introduced, the company was facing the challenge of deregulation in its service areas. The prospect of increased competition led the organization to refocus its customer service efforts; leaders realized that maintaining customer satisfaction would be critical to continued organizational success.

Deregulation also necessitated a change in focus for many of the organization's engineering groups. Much of their engineering focus shifted from plant design and construction to an efficient operations initiative. This initiative required engineers at company headquarters to partner with their counterparts at the plants in an effort to reduce costs and improve efficiencies within existing plants.

Redefining jobs at all levels created a challenge—helping its people adapt to a new environment and learn to function effectively in their new roles. Working together with company representatives, Avid Learner helped to develop a learning strategy to address these needs. A primary component of this strategy was to implement the How to Be a Star at Work<sup>®</sup> with engineers in the Power Generation Group. How to Be a Star at Work<sup>®</sup> training program was chosen because it develops critical work skills and then gives knowledge workers the chance to apply their learning—real time—to problems and issues.

### **RESEARCH**

#### **Participants**

Thirteen engineers and other professionals from the company's Power Generation Group participated in the How to Be a Star at Work<sup>®</sup> program. How to Be a Star at Work<sup>®</sup> was implemented in six full-day sessions, preceded by a half-day orientation session. Data were collected via survey during a follow-up session conducted shortly after completion of the program.



## Behavioral Effectiveness Measures

Participants were presented with a list of 21 specific behaviors sampled from the How to Be a Star at Work<sup>®</sup> sessions. Participants rated themselves on each specific behavior, on a 6-point scale, in two ways:

- How effectively they performed each behavior **before** the How to Be a Star at Work<sup>®</sup> program.
- How effectively they performed each behavior **after** participating in How to Be a Star at Work<sup>®</sup>.

(6 = Extremely Effectively; 1 = Not at all Effectively)

Participants also indicated the strategic areas in which they had experienced **increased opportunities** to use high-performance strategies as a result of participating in How to Be a Star at Work<sup>®</sup>.

## Motivation and Work Environment Measures

Participants also indicated their degree of agreement to each of seven statements describing:

- Motivation to use skills learned in How to Be a Star at Work<sup>®</sup>.
- Support from managers, peers, and the company.
- Confidence in their ability to use How to Be a Star at Work<sup>®</sup>.
- Access to resources and information.

(7 = Strongly Agree; 1 = Strongly Disagree)



## **RESULTS**

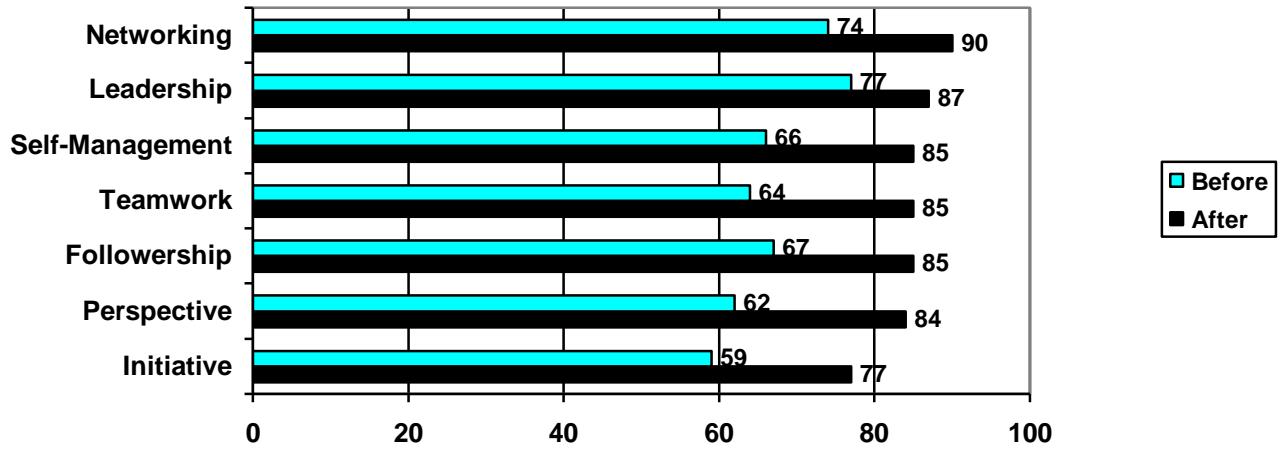
### **Effective performance increased an average of 18% after How to Be a Star at Work<sup>®</sup>**

As shown in Figure 1, participants are performing specific behaviors much more effectively than they were before the program. More than 75% of the participants are performing each of the seven types of behaviors effectively or better. In contrast, only one of the behaviors (Leadership) was performed effectively by 75% of the participants before the program.

The number of participants performing the How to Be a Star at Work<sup>®</sup> behaviors effectively, very effectively, or extremely effectively rose by at least 10% for each of the behavior areas. Clearly, effective performance of strategic behaviors targeted in the program increased dramatically.



**Figure 1. Percent of participants effectively performing strategic behaviors before and after Star@Work\***



\* Percent performing "Effectively," "Very Effectively," or "Extremely Effectively."

**Participants predict that their productivity improvements will nearly double in the next six months.**

Since you began How to Be a Star at Work <sup>®</sup> :	Average improvement
How much has your productivity increased (at time of program's completion)?	19%
How much will your productivity increase during the next six months?	35%

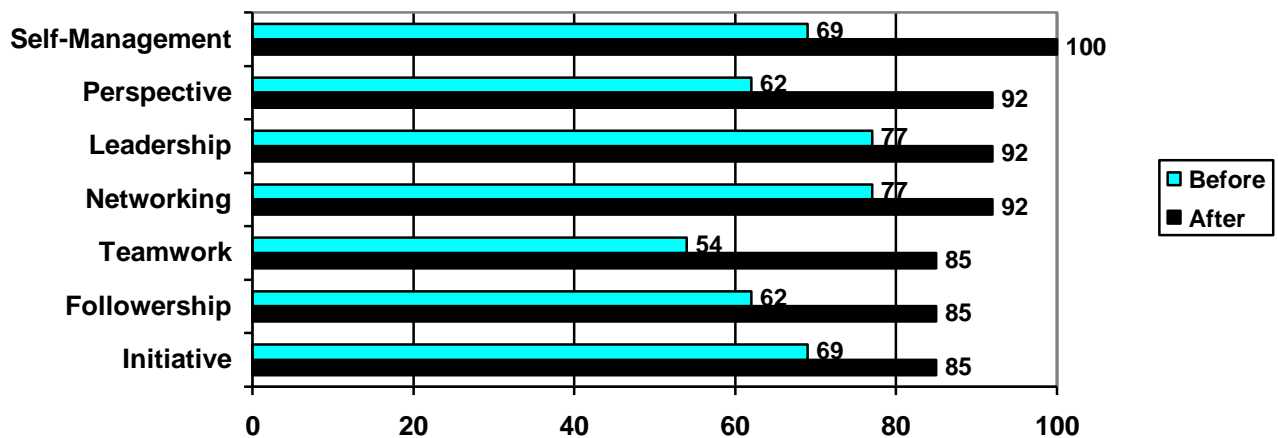
In addition to reporting specific behavior effectiveness for before and after How to Be a Star at Work<sup>®</sup>, participants also were asked to rate their productivity improvements as of the follow-up session and to predict their continued productivity improvements over the



six months following the program. The average self-rating of overall productivity improvement following the program (19%) was nearly identical to the average performance improvement reported on the strategic behaviors (18%--see Figure 1). Further, the participants expect that their improvements will continue to grow during the six months following the program, nearly doubling from the increases reported immediately after completing the program.

To further illustrate the resulting performance improvements in each area, Figure 2 presents the specific behaviors from each strategic area in which the greatest improvements were seen. These are behavioral statements drawn from the survey described in the Research section.

**Figure 2. Percent of participants effectively performing specific behaviors before and after Star@Work\*.**



\* Percent performing "Effectively," "Very Effectively," or "Extremely Effectively."  
 Note: Twenty-one specific behaviors were measured. The behaviors listed above are a representative sample.



## **SPECIFIC BEHAVIORS TARGETED BY How to Be a Star at Work®**

**Self-Management.** I make sure that I fully understand, in advance, the expectations for a particular work assignment.

**Perspective.** I have a clear idea of how the product/project I'm working on fits into the strategy of my business unit and the organization.

**Networking.** I actively seek information from contacts in interfacing groups to keep abreast of developments that might affect my work.

**Leadership.** I understand the "big picture" aspect of projects and, if necessary, take technical command to make sure tough problems are addressed and solved.

**Teamwork.** I work with team members to develop a common understanding of our goals.

**Followership.** I inform the leader/team when I believe we are going in the wrong direction.

**Initiative.** I look for opportunities to improve a process or idea, even if I am not expected to do so.

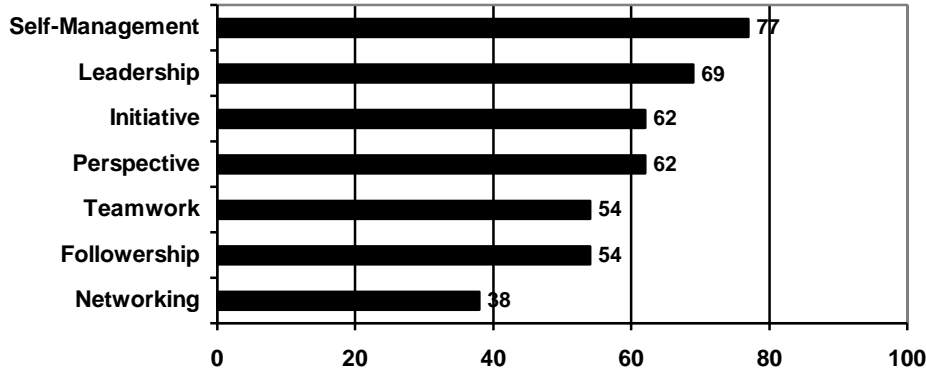
Similar to the behavioral improvements reported at the strategic level in Figure 1, significant improvements were reported for these specific behaviors. At least 85% of the participants are performing these behaviors effectively or better. An average of 24% more report effective performance of these behaviors following How to Be a Star at Work® versus before the program.

## **Opportunities to use high-performance strategies increased as a result of How to Be a Star at Work®**

Participants indicated those areas targeted by the program in which they had experienced increased opportunities to use high-performance behaviors, regardless of how effectively they handled the opportunity. One of the goals of the How to Be a Star at Work® program is to enable participants to more readily recognize opportunities to apply these strategic behavior practices. Increases were reported for each of the seven strategies, particularly Self-Management and Leadership, as shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3. Percent participants reporting increased opportunities to use high-performance strategies.**

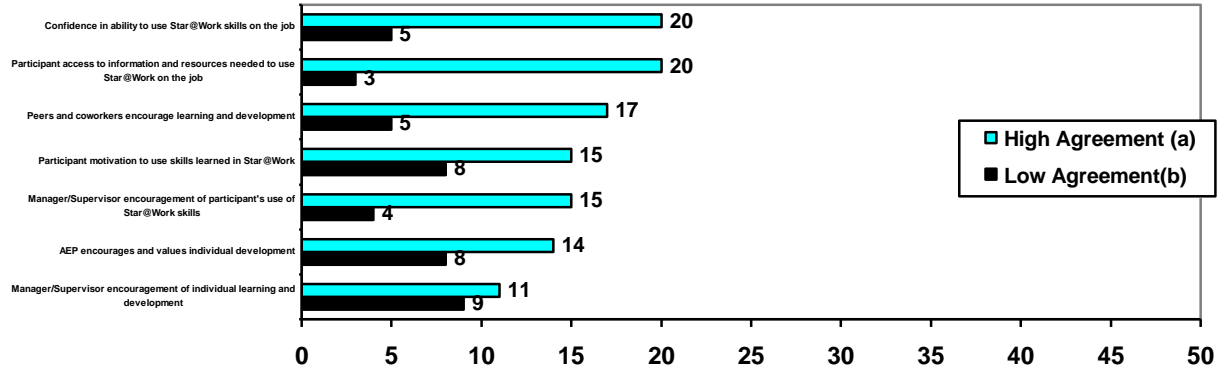


**Motivation, confidence, and a supportive work environment enhance performance.**

Participants were asked to indicate their agreement to a small number of statements describing their motivation and confidence in using skills learned in How to Be a Star at Work<sup>®</sup> and supportive qualities of their work environment. Figure 4 clearly demonstrates that these factors are critical to increased performance effectiveness following the program. Improvements in performance were four times as great for those engineers who are confident in their ability to use How to Be a Star at Work<sup>®</sup> on the job, have access to needed information and resources, and are encouraged to use How to Be a Star at Work<sup>®</sup> skills on the job by their manager or supervisor. Improvements also are much greater when participants are motivated and when they feel that their learning and development are supported by their peers. The average performance increase is less than 10% for individuals who feel that these factors are lacking.



**Figure 4. Percent increase in overall performance according to the presence of positive individual and work environment factors.**



(a) Percent responding 5 or higher on a 7-point scale.

(b) Percent responding less than 5 on a 7-point scale.

### *Successfully Applying How to Be a Star at Work®*

Participants provided comments, describing their successes with How to Be a Star at Work®, on the survey sheets:

- “I have focused my work efforts on resolving problems brought to me by my customers. I have worked closely with my customers, have a good relationship with them, and have been successful in handling their problems.”
- “I have begun to lay out my schedule more ‘religiously’ and have begun to make better use of my time when it is not committed to something already. This helps me follow through on [my] commitments.”
- “I have already used Followership strategies to design and implement methods to support and help my manager to delegate items to myself (or others) to lighten his workload.”



- “I identified a process that was not effective and developed and implemented a strategy to improve it.”
- “Using Initiative techniques, I was able to contribute [more] to strategy meetings for our division.”
- “I found the Leadership and Followership sessions to be very useful to changing the way I choose to seek out opportunities for development and performance.”
- “The strength of the program is that it brings to the forefront strategies that are somewhat intuitive to most. Because they are intuitive, however, most of us do not think about them consciously. For this reason we can make improvements in those strategies.”

## CONCLUSIONS

Members of the company’s Power Generation Group report that effective performance has increased dramatically since participating in the How to Be a Star at Work<sup>®</sup> program. These increases are evident at the specific behavior, strategy, and overall productivity levels. In addition to increased effectiveness, participants also are more aware of opportunities to use high-performance strategic behaviors.

Support from the work environment further facilitates performance improvements. When individuals feel that their learning and development are supported by their peers, their manager, and the organization, their performance increases dramatically versus those engineers who do not perceive this level of support. Finally, individual motivation and confidence in using How to Be a Star at Work<sup>®</sup> skills also are associated with greater improvements.

