

## Leading a Customer First Culture Transformation

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MidAmerican Energy Company, headquartered in Des Moines, Iowa, meets the energy needs of nearly 1.6 million customers in Iowa, Illinois, Nebraska and South Dakota. A subsidiary of Berkshire Hathaway Energy, MidAmerican has more than 3,300 employees dedicated to meeting their mission to be the best energy company in serving customers while delivering sustainable energy solutions.

Like many in their particular industry, MidAmerican is being challenged to be quicker, more nimble, and more creative at solving their customers' challenges. As they continue on a journey to transform their culture from an old-school utility company into one that is mission-driven and customer-focused, they sought the expertise of the consortium partnership between the Excellence with Integrity Institute and The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University.

Drawing upon their diverse workplace culture assessment and development experiences, The Ray Center developed a series of customized professional development trainings focused on MidAmerican's *Customer First* initiative. These sessions, developed using the Excellence with Integrity™ Culture Development Tools and facilitated by trainers from The

Ray Center, were constructed around the six facets of *Customer First*, as identified and defined by MidAmerican. The trainings, which included reflection assessment tools integrated with real-life, practical examples, were piloted with C-suite executives and refined based on continuous improvement feedback. This professional development series was then delivered over a year-and-a-half through nearly 20 trainings impacting approximately 350 MidAmerican employees who have management and supervisory responsibilities.

The main goals of the customized trainings were:

- (1) to initiate transformation of MidAmerican culture into one that prioritizes the needs and experiences of the customer (*Customer First* culture);
- (2) to develop the *Customer First* mindset with a dual emphasis on both the internal and external dimensions of the vision;
- (3) to teach common strategies, skills and behaviors that managers would need to instill and support the *Customer First* mindset among employees.

Each person trained left the session with a plan for leading a *Customer First* Mindset initiative in his or her department.

A culture check-in utilizing focus group and interview methodologies found promising signs of impact and important areas for continued culture growth and development. Focus group participants articulated support for their experiences of *improved communication, professional trust, perspective taking* and *overall collegiality*. Additional signs of growth cited also included the *breakdown of internal silos*, which improved *internal cohesion*, and *efficiency* resulting in a *more consistent Customer First* experience by MidAmerican's external customers. There was a consistent and widespread belief that a tangibly more intentional, cohesive workplace culture (a shared "MidAmerican Way") has emerged, as compared to before the trainings and the culture change initiative.

There is much evidence of impact around the *Customer First* culture efforts underway at MidAmerican, a great deal of hard-earned trust, confidence, and goodwill in

the overall direction and the emerging culture habits in support of the vision. Just like a physical strength and conditioning plan, the plan for strength and conditioning of culture builds on a base and evolves to meet the unique demands of each time period within the journey to the overall goal. The next phase of culture strengthening at MidAmerican will seek to reinforce the core of communication and community—strong interpersonal relationships—while building new capacity for care-frontation, creativity, problem solving, and negotiation.

MidAmerican's commitment to creating a *Customer First* experience for its external customers begins with its commitment to building an internal *Customer First* culture. The commitment to excellence that MidAmerican seeks is something leaders, managers, and employees intentionally train for, measure, monitor, and continuously improve upon.

## ABOUT THE CONSORTIUM

More than a decade ago the Excellence with Integrity Institute and The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University created a consortium partnership to advance our respective visions and missions. Together, we pursue strategic opportunities in youth leadership, employment and STEM readiness, athletics, education, and organizational development in community and workplace environments. The Institute's main focus is on research and development of instructional resources, assessment solutions, and tools and strategies for organizational culture development. The Ray Center's main focus is on coaching, training and expanding our collaborative implementation projects across Iowa and the nation.

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