

A Leadership Is Everyone's Business Success Story "You're in Good Hands" with Allstate's Leadership Development Program

The Allstate Corporation is the nation's largest publicly held personal lines insurer. A Fortune 50 company, with \$149 billion in assets, Allstate sells 13 major lines of insurance, including auto, property, life, and commercial. A major tenet of the company's "You're In Good Hands With Allstate" slogan rests in the ability and leadership of its dedicated network of 70,000 professionals, which includes nearly 39,000 employees as well as its agents, and financial specialists, and their licensed sales professionals.

Allstate touts a high performance work environment with a diverse team of employees that encourages individual accountability, innovative thinking and continuous learning and improvement. This philosophy was evidenced when the company invited its employees to participate in a voluntary innovation competition in which proposals would be reviewed and judged to determine the one winning idea that would be implemented within the company.

The competition drew more than 100 proposals that were narrowed down to a field of 12 and ultimately a winner was chosen—a leadership academy based on the philosophy of Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, foremost experts in leadership development and authors of *The Leadership Challenge*. This idea was proposed by claim adjusters Alex Perez-Rubio and Joe Seaton.

Alex and Joe, both of whom gained an understanding and appreciation of leadership programs from their earlier education at military universities, knew that developing leadership skills within the ranks of Allstate employees could have a very positive affect across every facet of the organization.

"We proposed a leadership academy because leadership is the one thing that all successful organizations have in common," said Joe. "We designed a program that would enable people at all levels to develop leadership skills which they could take with them back to their respective roles within the company."

Neither Joe nor Alex was familiar with *The Leadership Challenge* when they started their proposal, but they discovered it during their initial research and unanimously agreed it would provide an ideal foundation for Allstate. "The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership outlined in *The Leadership Challenge* were right in line with our company's ideals," said Alex. "It was a perfect fit."

In the early stages of the project, Joe and Alex e-mailed Jim Kouzes for some guidance on putting together a leadership academy. They were just hoping for a short returned e-mail with some insight, but about an hour later Jim called them personally with some words of wisdom and encouragement. "We had no idea we would get such a prompt reply and he would call us himself" said Alex. "It left a great impression on us that he would take time from his busy day to personally share his thoughts with us."

In developing their proposal, the two went so far as to fly to Northern California from Virginia to attend 4 days of facilitator training offered by Sonoma Learning Systems, which they funded on their own. This preparation not only provided them with more in-depth information about the history of The Leadership Challenge, the research behind The Five Practices model, and the instructional design underpinnings of The Leadership Challenge Workshop, but it exhibited their dedication to the project and ultimately helped them design the winning proposal.

Since winning the innovation competition at Allstate, Joe and Alex have been busy developing a pilot program for the company that will be rolled out in early 2006. The one-year program calls for a residence-type academy that will provide 10-day on-site leadership development for employees at all levels.

"Because we've based this program on the principals outlined in The Leadership Challenge we're confident that it will help contribute to Allstate's continued success," said Joe.