



Reality HR: A Conversation with Jay Wenberg

A Conversation with Jay Wenberg, Assistant Vice President of Management Development with Jefferson Pilot Financial.

HR.com: What business issue were you facing at Jefferson Pilot?

JW: We were looking to build a high performance culture. Part of the equation is hiring the right people but the other part of the equation is figuring out how best to leverage the intellectual abilities of each employee. I wanted to incorporate a new training program that would improve our employees' thinking abilities.

HR.com: What solutions did you look at?

JW: I knew of a solution from work I once did at a large manufacturing company. At that firm one of the biggest challenges that we faced was making our meetings more productive. We adopted Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats[®] program and that was so successful that I decided to use it at Jefferson Pilot Financial.

HR.com: What is the Six Hats methodology?

JW: The program is a framework for timed sequential parallel thinking. Edward's work focuses on three disciplines: *focus*—which means knowing exactly what you are thinking about at any given time; *time*—allotting a certain amount of time for each thinking mode; and *mode*—focusing on one type of thinking per period.

The six hats are a metaphor for six different types of thinking; the idea being that by switching hats, you switch thinking modes. It is sequential, timed and most importantly parallel which means everyone does the same type of thinking at the same time for the same amount of time. You move on to the next type of thinking together as a group. The program is very simple and very powerful.

HR.com: How did you bring this program into Jefferson Pilot?

JW: First we developed a training curriculum around our core competencies. Then I used the Six Thinking Hats[®] program as the centerpiece of our training that supports the performance culture.

HR.com: How have you applied the program in your organization?

JW: We use this program to facilitate all types of teams and group environments. We have used it to help us with everything from facilitating product development teams, to helping teams name insurance products, to working on business unit strategies. We have used it in our channels to help develop recruiting strategies, and manage our agents. It has helped us become more of a pro-active business partner with our internal customer groups. In terms of performance management, we have used it to help us with our core competencies such as communication skills, team, and leadership skill Hats" are well aligned with our core competencies.

HR.com: Did you have to do anything special to get de Bono's thinking model so widely applied in the workplace?

JW: Yes. In partnership with a number of organizations we hosted an event featuring Dr. de Bono as a keynote. We also conducted public seminars where we took people through the 1 or 2-day lateral thinking program. Finally, we certified additional instructors—that took about one week.

Edward was also kind enough to spend a couple of hours with the marketing division talking about industry specific issues. There was a lot of time, energy and passion invested in making this program one of our core initiatives.

HR.com: What results have you seen since implementing the program?

JW: I have worked with the Six Thinking Hats[®] program for twelve years in three different organizations and the results speak for themselves. Using the program enables you to get up to 36% more output in 66% less time. That means that you can turn a two-hour meeting into a 40-minute meeting. When you add in Edward's other program *Lateral Thinking*, which has more to do with Green Hat (creative) thinking, you get more ideas, richer ideas, and more creative ideas than you do with brainstorming. We use the "Hats" and "Laterals" to get more creative thinking and to get it done in less time.

HR.com: Do you have any advice for HR Managers interested in improving thinking processes in their organization?

JW: There are a lot of programs designed to help the creative thinking process but in my experience Edward de Bono's approach is the most effective and the easiest to learn. When you introduce the program into your organization you need to start at the top. You will know that you have made it work when it shows up in your performance management process, when it is part of the appraisal process and when it becomes the way you do business.



Jay is the Assistant VP of Management Development with Jefferson Pilot Financial. He has extensive experience in Training and Development and Quality Improvement and has held senior positions with companies such as Lorillard and VF Corp. Jay is also a partner with the training and consulting firm, Wright Performance (www.wrightperformance.com). Jay is certified in many national training and development programs. He is one of only 18 Master Trainers for 6 Hats in the world.