



Case Study

Accelerating the Development of High-Potential Directors

The Challenges

Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) is a charitable cultural organization with a mission to transform the way people see the world through film. For a few years TIFF had been experiencing rapid growth, which had resulted in an increasingly complex organizational structure: 23 departments, each with its own director.

Directors and their teams were working in silos, each with its own agenda. There was little communication between teams, which often manifested as interdepartmental conflict and undercollaboration. With directors coming in with differing levels of experience, some were less willing to deal with conflict, leading to further communication challenges and deceleration of projects.

The Human Resources director had put together a professional development program geared towards new and upcoming managers, but this didn't translate well for the director-level, who needed more advanced training. With a view towards succession planning, the HR director chose to run The Roundtable Catalyst program, and mandated participation with the entire director group.



Sandy Lee
Former Director of
Human Resources,
TIFF

The Goals

- Improve collaboration, break down the silos.
- Build on maturity of skills within the director group.
- Shrink the gap between capabilities of directors and executives.
- Form better interdepartmental relationships.
- Embed coaching into the culture of the organization.



"I would recommend The Roundtable a million times over! They have such skilled facilitators and we felt so supported during the first year to get this off the ground and make it successful. They were fully committed to our success."

Sandy Lee
Former Director,
Human Resources, TIFF

The Solution

Director participants were broken into three groups of eight directors each, who met once monthly for three hours with their Roundtable facilitator.

The facilitator and HR director had developed a 'slow build' sequence of topics to be tackled during the sessions, to gain the trust of all participants, some of whom started as skeptics.

Topics included:

- ✓ Values
- ✓ Finding Strengths
- ✓ Navigating Difficult Conversations
- ✓ Influence

Beyond traditional one-to-one mentoring, these peer mentoring sessions gave the directors the opportunity to build their coaching skills while also expanding leadership capabilities and forging stronger internal relationships. With a high focus around confidentiality, vulnerability, openness and trust, for many directors, this was a very new and different experience. Some participants even began meeting outside of the peer coaching sessions to work through issues that came up.

"It's the peer coaching element that makes it work. You look across the table at your colleagues and you think, they don't have it as bad (or as good) as I do. Then suddenly you realize that everybody is in the same boat, dealing with the same challenges. And we all can use the same support and guidance from each other. There were many "Holy shit, I had no idea that you were dealing with this" moments. This created many unifying moments for us."

Sandy Lee
Former Director of Human Resources, TIFF

The Impact

As early as the first few months, the HR director began observing some changes in her colleagues:

More openness between directors. Where previously there may have been some hesitation on a peer-to-peer level to have a difficult conversation, directors showed more willingness to put hard conversations on the table and work through them.

More empathy and understanding. Directors were becoming more thoughtful in their approaches showing more understanding of people's differences and motivations.

Shift from managing to leading. Directors were developing a more strategic lens around:

- More effectively empowering the people on their teams
- Delegating to make more time for team direction
- Aligning team mandates against what the organization needed to accomplish

As the first year of Roundtable Catalyst sessions ended, the HR director was so thrilled with the results that she decided to run the program for a second year, but made participation voluntary.

To her surprise, 100% of the directors opted in! Given that there had been some skeptics going in, this was a strong sign that the participants were gleaning great value from the program.

Next Steps

If you're looking to bring a coaching program to your organization, visit goroundtable.com or email our team at info@goroundtable.com.