

MANAGEMENT

The apprentices

Four local companies teamed up to create an incubator program to develop emerging managers.

BY JEREMY J. ALFORD

Laurie Goff has multi-tasking down to a science.

A 38-year-old part-time registered nurse at Woman's Hospital, she spends her days in a perpetual crisis mode. Between rounds, Goff also fills the role of mother to a large family. But she wants to keep the two worlds separate.

"I like going to work, then leaving it there," Goff says, adding that she has finally settled into a comfortable routine after 15 years of nursing.

So it's no wonder Goff was surprised when the human relations department at Woman's enrolled her in the Management Incubator, a new program administered by the Baton Rouge-based Success Labs. The incubator allows companies to see if certain employees are management material—before they're promoted.

Through workshops, coaching sessions and group projects that smack of the TV show "The Apprentice," employers can see who's made of what.

The companies that created the curriculum and are bankrolling the program—Woman's, Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center, Community Coffee and Vulcan Chemicals—say they couldn't be happier.

Terry Bowman, vice president of



TEST RUN: Participants in the Management Incubator divided into teams tasked with fixing up homes as a way to get a feel for their management skills. From left are Laurie Goff of Woman's Hospital; John Nosacka of OLOL; Jill Mistretta of OLOL; homeowner Shirley Thomas; Mark Staley of Community Coffee; Angela Murray and Devin Lemoine of Success Labs; Jim Evans and Tony Lea of OLOL; and Bill Phillips of Success Labs.

ence," Bowman says. "We wanted to tap people who were already staff-line employees. It's an attempt to try and zero in on something that might be there under the surface."

The incubator combines experiential exercises, individual coaching and project management into an eight-week course. The inaugural session was held earlier this fall with 10 participants from each of the companies. Subsequent rounds with new classes are being planned for 2005.

Bill Phillips, president of Success Labs and coordinator of the incubator program, says each company shelled out roughly \$2,100 to support the curriculum and buy materials.

"It's a very small price to pay," Phillips says. "Think about it: If you move someone into management and it doesn't work out, how much will that cost you? Productivity crashes. There

homework and a required reading list.

The workshops cover management style and philosophy and present real workplace dilemmas using tools such as movie clips—*Jerry Maguire* was used to explore management missions. In their individual coaching sessions, participants must assess themselves to determine on their own whether management is right for them.

Goff says she learned a lot about herself through the incubator. Though management had never really been on her radar screen, the faith of her employer and the individual assessment has opened her eyes.

"I feel different about it now," Goff says. "Now I'm considering it for my future. I'm open to it. I feel I could do it if I wanted to. It really made me look inward."

An important aspect of the Management Incubator is the community impact project. The participants were split up into two teams and given the challenge of painting a Mid City house in half a day and adding some sort of value to the property.

The teams were asked to create a quasi-business plan to account for their resources, such as finances and labor.

Every step in the process had to be approved by an executive review board made up of company officials, who ultimately have the final say over any type of promotion, as well as community leaders. Phillips says the review board was in no way a "pushover" and team members were harshly criticized and

asked to repeat certain duties if they were not on their game.

"If you weren't doing well, believe me, the board would tell you," Phillips says, adding that the teams were given only 30-minute notices for several of the meetings. "You had to make sure your presentations were up and ready to go, and you knew what you were doing."

The winning team completed its portion of the house on time by recruiting outside help and installed a fire prevention system. The losing team did the painting and offered a landscaping addition to their project.

Bowman says the practicality of the sessions and the stress of the project combined for a good testing ground.

"We were looking for a way to identify managerial talent prior to promoting somebody," Bowman says. "Sending them through this was an opportunity to observe them in certain interactions and to see if they display leadership talents. The incubator gave them an opportunity to use skills they might not use in a staff level job."

Whether the participants came away sold on the glory of management remains a work in progress.

"A couple are really questioning it strongly," he says. "But no one said, 'No way.' A few are really pushing now, and others said they might take on a few projects to try it out. That's the kind of trial-and-error we encourage."

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TERRY BOWMAN, vice president of human resources, Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center

human resources at OLOL, was the impetus behind the program. He had been unable to find anything locally that would test management wannabes and inspire those reluctant few to enter the next level. With a simple concept in mind, Bowman recruited a few partners earlier this year.

"The niche we wanted to find here was exploring the people who don't already have any management experi-

are turnovers and all kinds of other things you can't foresee."

Phillips says the goal of the program is to supply the companies with reliable information about key management potential from real life situations. There are four full-day workshops, one team project day, three individual coaching sessions, the creation of a personal development plan and skill assessments. There's even

JEREMY ALFORD is a Baton Rouge-based free-lance writer.