

Plantronics approached UC Berkeley Executive Education about developing a program to train its leaders to adapt to change—which happens to be the research focus of faculty director Homa Bahrami. ExecEd spoke with Homa Bahrami and Executives and Senior Managers from Plantronics about the program.

Homa Bahrami: When Plantronics came to us, it was a big time in the company's evolution and transition. There are disruptive innovations that are impacting the business, there's great opportunities that they can leverage going forward, so Plantronics came to us to prepare their leaders for a world of disruptive innovation and really transformational change.

As leaders, how can they adapt and evolve their own leadership persona, how can they move their teams and their organizations and really think more into the future rather than relying on tried-and-true practices from the past. And that is what our program is really about.

Marguerite Kunze: We were really trying to think about the leader for the future. We didn't necessarily have a gap currently, but we're thinking about 'we're changing our strategy, we want to be more innovative', what's the type of leader that we need for the future? And when thinking through the type of curriculum that we were looking for we thought Berkeley would be a perfect fit for us.

I know about Berkeley but I didn't know much about their leadership curriculum. I did know about the Boot Camp and was impressed with that but once we met Homa it was kind of a done deal. She shared with us some of her research, the latest thinking around leadership, she shared with us some of the other faculty members and the and the insights that they could provide. She's very much a thought leader and I just knew she would connect with our employees.

Homa Bahrami: This is really designed for more middle management that has a lot of frontline teams and responsibilities so really they're the ones that are driving and moving the execution of the strategy and the implementation of many of their change initiatives. And as you appreciate it's one thing for senior executives to go to a program, but at the end of the day, transformational change does not happen if those who are really driving frontline initiatives aren't involved. So this was the

target population for our program.

Clare Tibbits: When I was told I was selected to go on the Berkeley program, I was really excited. It's been years since I've been at University and of course there's just such a fantastic reputation, so I was really excited and I actually did have quite high expectations of what I would learn and more importantly I was hoping what I could bring back and implement and make me a better manager.

James Foster: You know UC Berkeley's a very famous place and it was you know very I was very happy that my company was willing to sponsor me to do the course but from a professional perspective I really wanted to understand a bit more about how to manage global teams because I've got a team that's located everywhere across the globe a lot of different cultures and you know we don't get that much face-to-face time so I was really hoping to be able to get some insights and some better understanding about how to make my team more effective, how to interact with them better. And that's the really the main thing I was really hoping to get from the course.

Souley Ongoiba: I love the Berkeley spirit of 'challenging the status quo' because really to me as a leader that's really one of the things that I value a lot so that was really sort of the excitement: knowing that you look at things differently and that's really the expectation that I'm seeing and have seen in many ways.

Homa Bahrami: The way we customize our programs is we have a team here on the Berkeley side and we have a team on the Plantronics side. And the co-creation happens through the interactions between the two sets of teams. So we have a three-member core team over here at Berkeley in our Center for Executive Education and we have a team at Plantronics led by the individual in charge of their learning and development and we bring in other players as needed. So other faculty, other executives, as we customize. Somebody like myself who's the Faculty Director interviews all the senior executives to get an understanding of the context, the opportunity that we have for learning for this particular target population. Then we sit down with our Plantronics co-creating team and we brainstorm together and we put together the program. So it's very much a partnership.

Marguerite Kunze: Maybe what's a little bit unique is the time that Berkeley and Homa have taken to really get to know us. We've spent a lot of time with the faculty members in advance of the program. They met our senior leadership team, they

met with some of our associates, so they really took the time to get to know us and understand what our needs were. We spent a lot of time talking about where we're headed in the future, our growth, and a lot of the break-out sessions and the activities were designed very custom and specific to us and our needs, even some of the topic areas. We're going through significant change, in a positive way, as a company so Homa introduced her concept of adaptive DNA and it really was a great fit for us.

Clare Tibbits: The course was actually devised that we had to do some pre-reading to I think get our brain cells working and also introduce us to the subjects that we were going to cover. And I think what was really important is our first day was spent on self. So it was our own DNA, our own leadership style, us as a person, and that really got you thinking.

Day Two was then about teams and how you fit within your teams and how you can manage a well-functioning, great performing team. I actually think the combination of lectures, really fantastic examples from companies that you've heard of that you admire were just fantastic throughout the day.

Marguerite Kunze: It was a really dynamic three days. It was a mix of pure coaching, lecture, assessment, self-reflection, presentations, practice. So it was really, I thought, very well orchestrated.

James Foster: Definitely identified areas where I can be a better coach, listen more, and not kind of dictate solutions and answers by being too forceful as a mentor. So some of those things have really, I've seen some great opportunities for me to improve how I manage the team, how I communicate with the team, and also how I allow my team to come up with the answers on their own.

Marguerite Kunze: It's completely exceeded our expectations in every way from content to the experience that they provided the participants on campus to just taking the time to even do small things like think about what are the places that people can go in their free time and downtime so everything has just been a great experience.

Homa Bahrami: After they join us they are expected to go back and cascade these learnings to the broader community. We actually do a survey of the participants who go to their workshops, we have office hours to help them basically design and

deliver the workshops and to really take the learnings and cascade it to a much broader population. We also have a series of webinars after the program to see what they've done, how things have worked, what are their questions, and to really reinforce the network and the community spirit that we hope to build.

One of the real intangible benefits that we find is particularly helpful in a company like Plantronics, you know has many virtual global teams they're a global company, so many of these individuals work together but may not see each other on a regular basis. By being immersed in a learning environment for three days, interacting very intensely, they really build relationships of trust that will carry beyond the program itself and we hope to create this learning community that can sustain itself through these network relationships beyond the duration of the program.

Marguerite Kunze: So I think Berkeley is definitely the perfect partner. Primarily because they are based in steep research and important concepts and really well-versed in the area of leadership but also important because they took the time to really get to know us, understand our specific needs, and really weave that in and incorporate it into the program.

Souley Ongoiba: I feel that I've changed, I've grown and I can see in many ways and I know I will be able to go back and add value to our business. Really looking forward to bringing it back to people, I'm excited.

Clare Tibbits: I have done other programs, I've done a lot of self learning, and we've done a lot of online webinar-type. Nothing compares to actually having experts in front of you sharing their experience. There is a lot of information I have learned but more importantly, takeaways that will empower me as a leader to take back and I'm sure make my team better- performing. And I can't wait to share my learning with my team and I hope this is going to make me an inspirational leader because that is what the course is about.