# The Most Trusted Source on Becoming a Better Leader

### *The Leadership Challenge* Helps Booz Allen Hamilton Achieve Performance Excellence

As a leading global strategy and technology consulting firm, Booz Allen Hamilton is continually working to improve the lifeblood of its business: employees. Seizing the opportunity to facilitate leadership, the company integrated *The Leadership Challenge® Workshop* into its work culture nine years ago. Since then, more than 2,500 leaders at the Virginia-headquartered company have attended the class, which espouses the philosophy of Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, the foremost experts in leadership development who penned the best-selling book of the same name.

The 90-year-old organization generates annual sales of $3.3 billion; works with major international corporations and government clients; and employs more than 16,000 people on six continents. This year, it earned second place in *Training* magazine's "Top 100" list and was named one of the "100 Best Companies to Work For" in *FORTUNE* magazine.

"The primary reason we implemented *The Leadership Challenge* was to give leaders an opportunity to see how others perceive them and how they see themselves," says Senior Director Ed Cohen. "It also helps them develop an action plan."

Cohen oversees Booz Allen Hamilton's Center for Performance Excellence, which builds and expands the company's learning culture through workshops, online self-study courses, a virtual online campus, and more.

In 1996, the three-day workshop's rollout began with the firm's partners. Then it cascaded to the principals and eventually evolved to the senior-management level. A 360-degree assessment instrument, *The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)* serves as the foundational feedback tool for the workshop.

*LPI* is the best-selling aid that approaches leadership as a set of behaviors. This comprehensive leadership-assessment tool measures behaviors and guides leaders-in-training through the process of applying Kouzes and Posner's The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership" model.

At Booz Allen Hamilton, follow-up coaching is held one month after *The Leadership Challenge® Workshop*. During this one-on-one post-session, the individual's action plan is reviewed and each leader can consider his or her progress.

Sometimes leaders will also participate in *Leadership Challenge* triads, where individuals identify and isolate specific areas of their *LPI* that they judge needs improvement. Then the participants work as a team, interacting collaboratively and sharing knowledge, skills, success, and failure to help improve competencies and attain a performance level of strength.

Booz Allen Hamilton measures the workshop's success in two ways: end-of-course reviews by attendees and the number of referrals to the course.

"Though not a mandatory program, every single person who qualifies—senior associates, principals, and partners—has attended," says Cohen. "They see attendance at this program as key to their development as leaders, and we want our leaders to be better leaders."

This highly valued workshop is viewed as a privilege. Those who qualify are asked to wait at least one year after their promotion or hiring to a senior-level position before attending. "This one-year period gives them a chance to perform in a leadership role before being assessed," says Cohen.

*The Leadership Challenge® Workshop* is part of the firm's ongoing, whole leadership-training program and culture that combines mentoring and apprenticeship. Last year alone there was an average of 500 new hires each month. Keeping stride with the workforce's rapid growth, the Center for Performance Excellence expanded nearly 50 percent from 49 to 72 trainers.

"We know that our leaders inherently want to do better," says Cohen. "*The Leadership Challenge® Workshop* and subsequent follow-up sessions are opportunities to reflect on where they see themselves and if their perceptions are in alignment with others. If not, they can take guided measures to create alignment and agreement."