



CASE STUDY

Ginkgo Bioworks

COACHING HIGHLY SKILLED SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

Ginkgo Bioworks is the organism company. Using the power of biology, Ginkgo Bioworks builds sustainable products in food, pharma, manufacturing, and more. Using sophisticated software and state of the art automation, Ginkgo's powerful platform for genetic engineering makes biology easier to engineer, enabling new products to be renewably manufactured with biology.



The Challenge

AS THE HEAD OF PEOPLE AT GINKGO BIOWORKS, DR. SAMANTHA SUTTON'S GOAL IS TO BUILD AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE, BY WORKING AT GINKGO, EACH TEAM MEMBER GROWS INTO A BETTER VERSION OF THEMSELVES.

Ginkgo Bioworks has an innate corporate culture of self-learning and a team of highly skilled subject matter experts. As Samantha says, "We hire very high-potential individuals, and don't necessarily hire someone solely for the role that we're hiring for. We hire someone who will fill that role and then have even higher potential."

At Ginkgo, leadership is not defined as having a management role but as the quality of being able to lead in any role that one takes on. Samantha understood that to ensure these high-potential team members continue to grow and excel as leaders, personal and soft skills development would be critical. As their roles become more global and cross-functional, their "success is very much contingent upon building a strong technical leadership," and traditional management training is not sufficient for many of these individuals.



The Solution

From past experience as a coach herself, Samantha knew that coaching was going to help her team enhance their technical leadership skills, but this fast-growing organization would also need a scalable way to implement it. Samantha began her research and tested out four different coaching platforms, including AceUp, with different team member cohorts from across the company, all of which started to receive one-on-one coaching.

Samantha regularly met with the cohorts to hear their feedback, with a very high bar for what she wanted to see from the coaches. Rather than just having a cheerleader in their corner, Samantha said, “I wanted coaches who would be able to help steer the ship for our team, many of whom aren’t sure where the ship needs to go.” She was looking for the highest caliber of coaches who would be insightful and embedded in the team’s overall journey.

Samantha ultimately selected AceUp for the high quality of their coaches, the reported excitement from the team around their experience, and AceUp’s very hands-on approach to working with their customers.

The Impact

During regular check-ins with those receiving coaching, Samantha reported that “happiness with AceUp was very high.” During the first few months of working with AceUp, new managers became more well-rounded leaders. As one team member said, “My coach helped me see things from a different perspective that helped me move forward and be a better leader.” Coaching demonstrated some eye-opening moments and unexpected outcomes around value. “My coach was able to meet me where I was and deliver value in places that I didn’t even know I needed to focus on,” another team member reported.

What's Next

For 2020, Ginkgo Bioworks and AceUp committed to a year-long coaching program, doubling the number of team members enrolled. Samantha wants to bring even more structure into the program by implementing a coaching ambition project for each team member enrolled in coaching so they can articulate what they want to accomplish during their coaching time and measure results against those goals.

Additionally, each team member's manager will start to meet with their coach to share additional insight around the team member and focus on areas for them to better clarify what success means.

Lastly, Samantha is building a coaching culture at Ginkgo by organizing cohorts, from kickoff meetings to ongoing gatherings, where each team member can share openly, as they see fit, what their experience with coaching is like and what they are gaining from it.

“**ACEUP'S CALIBER OF COACHES IS VERY HIGH. IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO US THAT THE COACHES GAIN THE RESPECT OF HIGHLY SKEPTICAL, BRILLIANT PEOPLE WHO DON'T TOLERATE MEDIOCRITY AT ALL—AND THAT'S WHAT THEY DID.**”





About AceUp

For companies that want to maximize their employee engagement, increase retention, and foster performance through a culture of transformational learning, AceUp delivers personalized executive coaching to empower professionals to maximize their impact. AceUp's coaching is enabled by technology and backed by data. Our mission is to help employees develop the skills and confidence they need to succeed in their roles today and tomorrow and to thrive within their organizations. Our company is informed by leaders from Harvard, MIT and Yale with a growing community of vetted executive coaches, certified by ICF, iPEC, CTI, Hudson Institute, Harvard University, and in partnership with the Institute of Coaching.

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