

## How a CEO Inspired a New Business by Taking People Out of Their Comfort Zone



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### A Fast Start and Rapid Expansion

Does a spectacular growth curve have to level off? For Sodexo, executive development is one key to keeping the company on the rise. Founded in 1966 in Marseilles, Sodexo started fast and never looked back, earning its place among the world's largest companies in barely four decades of remarkably rapid expansion. It has become the seventh largest European employer and the 22nd largest worldwide, with 380,000 employees and sales of over €15 billion in 80 countries.

Ranked third among the world's outsourcing companies by the International Association of Outsourcing Professionals, Sodexo had built its success mainly as an on-site provider of food services for large corporate clients as well as schools, hospitals and entertainment venues. But by 2005, top management saw the company's future reaching beyond its beginnings in food services.

### The Challenge: Taking Leaders Beyond Their Comfort Zone

To ensure continuing growth, Sodexo staked a claim to a whole new marketplace of its own creation, not just by expanding the scope of its offerings, but also by becoming a strategic partner in the eyes of its clients. The mandate: design, manage and deliver comprehensive quality-of-life service solutions. The company's new strategic goal: to become a provider of value-added solutions for all non-core and near-core activities within client businesses. Its redefined mission: to improve the quality of daily life for all the people it serves, delivering a unique mix of services to the client's consumers not just on-site, but off-site and in their personal lives as well. "We are inventing a new business," declared CEO Michel Landel.

Taking cues from the needs of Sodexo clients and clients' customers to capture growing market opportunities, the new strategy challenged the company's 300 Group Senior Leaders worldwide to push beyond their traditional comfort zone as a food-and-facilities management services provider with thriving but essentially isolated service components. Sodexo's learning and development organization turned its attention to the next level down in the organization. The goal: engage this critical population of 1,000 senior



managers around the world, demonstrate to them the value of Sodexo's ambitious new strategy, and show them how to make that strategy into reality by building a unique offering based on 100% complementary on-site service and motivation solutions.

### The Transformation: a CLIMB to Next-Generation Performance

Execs in charge of Sodexo's learning and training resources set the target of inspiring this highly diverse community of leaders to "own" the new strategy in just two years. That challenging time span made it clear that the usual training and

development methods would not suffice. So the Sodexo Management Institute designed a sophisticated development initiative called CLIMB (Change, Leadership, IMplementation, Behaviors), then worked with BTS to develop new techniques that would bring CLIMB to life.

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The finished program architecture employed the Group Senior Leader community in a key delivery role and included e-learning curricula, self-assessments, peer coaching, virtual team assignments, face-to-face sessions and international virtual meetings. Strategically placed at the heart of the program was a customized, competitive simulation called VirtuoSo—built to integrate and test participants' successful application of the newly acquired knowledge.

It was a considerable cultural leap for the vast majority of CLIMB participants, but the gamble has certainly paid off. "For most of our senior executives this blended global learning approach was very new," says Maria Outters, VP of Senior Executive Development and HR Development at Sodexo. And proving that nothing succeeds like success, CLIMB's effectiveness has fueled a new generation of advanced training tools at Sodexo. "It gave us a global success in distance learning, enabling us to drive the deployment of more new learning technology and blended learning around the world for our managers."

### The Future of Sodexo

Sodexo's growth curve continues to rise, and milestone after milestone proves that CLIMB is working. Self-assessments are providing even more specific information on the program's results: In initial feedback, 84 percent of the participants ranked their learning experience as "highly effective" for their development and increased understanding of the new strategy. Engagement has increased by seven points overall for those senior leaders who have been through the program compared to those that have not, and executive learners have shown strong support for the new training methodology. This wholehearted adoption of blended and distance learning will be key to the company's continued growth.

### About BTS

BTS focuses on the people side of strategy, working with leaders at all levels to help them make better decisions, convert those decisions to actions and deliver results. At our core, we believe people learn best by doing. For 30 years, we've been designing fun, powerful experiences™ that have profound and lasting impact on people and their careers. We inspire new ways of thinking, build critical capabilities and unleash business success. It's strategy made personal.

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