

Discovering the Value of Experiential Learning at a Leading Biotech Company

Written by Brian J. Miller Ed.M. and Eric Wong



Recently, Brian J. Miller, Director, Learning and Development at Gilead Sciences and Eric Wong, Director at BTS, reflected on their strategic partnership. In the following article, they discuss how experiential learning enabled Gilead, a leading biotech firm, to execute its strategy.

When you think of the biotech industry, you probably have visions of scientists engrossed in discovering and developing ground-breaking treatments to help thousands or even millions of people. Last year, one of the world's leading biotech firms tackled an interesting challenge. [Gilead Sciences](#), a research-based biopharmaceutical company and world leader in HIV/AIDS treatment, was challenged to expand its portfolio, retain top talent, drive shareholder value, and most important, continue to research, develop and provide access to innovative therapies that address high unmet medical needs.

To successfully execute Gilead's aspiration and strategy, it made an investment in developing the skills and capabilities of its most senior leaders. Partnering with [BTS](#) and another leading global consulting firm, Gilead developed its first-ever senior leadership development program – SLDP.

This program set out to develop four critical skills:

- Understanding Gilead's worldwide business
- Understanding and managing paradoxes/making complex decisions
- Leading across functions/influencing for results
- Developing and retaining talent

Just as important was how Gilead approached the development of its senior leaders. In a true partnership with Gilead, BTS designed and developed an innovative, custom, [business simulation-based](#) experience. Over the course of three days, participants were challenged to lead a company that closely resembled Gilead. Throughout the competitive experience, under intense time-constraints, leaders were challenged to navigate a number of critical issues including:

- Prioritization of investment in various therapeutic areas
- Structuring clinical trials to determine safety and efficacy of various drugs
- Determining where to manufacture drugs
- Managing the complexities of global reimbursement

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- Executing on pricing and marketing strategies
- Attracting and retaining scarce talent

In addition, senior leaders held invaluable conversations, built relationships across business units, and increased their understanding of the role each function played in driving organizational success. Another creative design element of the program was executive coaching for all leaders, enabling them to reflect on their leadership style and behavior under the pressures of competition.

A Partnership that Produced Results

Gilead and BTS created a fast-paced, dynamic program that provided senior leaders with a common understanding of Gilead's cross-functional business, including the skills, knowledge and insights to produce results at the enterprise level. The feedback has been outstanding:

- "This course allowed me to develop a great depth of understanding for Gilead and a huge appreciation of the complexities and interdependencies within our company."
- "This cross-functional simulation gave us an opportunity to work together, and learn real information about Gilead."
- "This was an excellent program and I highly recommend it to everyone at the Gilead VP/Sr. Dr. level."

Closing Thoughts

Eric Wong, Director at BTS: As I reflect on this program, which has been running for almost two years, I am impressed that a company with such a deeply scientific culture was able to get such value from

a business simulation-based experience. It is both a humbling and a rewarding experience to partner with brilliant leaders to drive the alignment, mindset, and know-how necessary to achieve their goals, especially when those goals are as noble as curing HIV/AIDS.

Brian J. Miller Ed.M., Director, Learning & Development at Gilead Sciences: For more than 15 years I have been in the strategy/leadership development field, and I continue to believe that great teams do great things. Simply put, BTS is a tremendous partner. Together we connected business issues to leadership actions, and challenged leaders to create a shared reality. Like Eric, I am humble and proud. Gilead aspiration is great and our scientific mission is compelling, and we can stand tall and say our commitment to leadership development is valuable.

BTS is a world leading strategy implementation firm that accelerates execution by building the alignment, mindset and capability needed to deliver superior business impact. The company leverages customized business simulations and experiential learning initiatives to help clients achieve better results, faster.

For more information, please visit www.bts.com.

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