

Group Therapy

The new BEMA-U cohort model for leadership training combines education with long-term networking.

In the baking industry's ever-evolving leadership landscape, training and education is more important than ever before. And as the industry works toward narrowing the workforce gap, initiatives such as standardized training are key to success.

In an effort to bring bakers and suppliers together — and create a more unified industry as a whole — BEMA has developed its own education initiative, known as BEMA-U. This year, it created the Transformational Leadership Series, which is done in the cohort style of learning, where small groups attend multiple sessions over a period of months, creating not only a more intimate learning environment but also long-term personal connections.

Baking & Snack recently sat down with Emily Bowers, director of education and professional development, BEMA, to gain an understanding of the organization's new series.

Joanie Spencer: What exactly is cohort learning? How is it different from other BEMA-U workshops?

Emily Bowers: By definition, a cohort is a group of people with similar characteristics, such as experiences, goals or concerns, which completes an entire learning experience together. The group is simultaneously monitored over time to share learnings and monitor progress. For example, many graduate education programs are designed around the cohort model; students begin a program with the same small group of people they will graduate with later. Cohort groups create

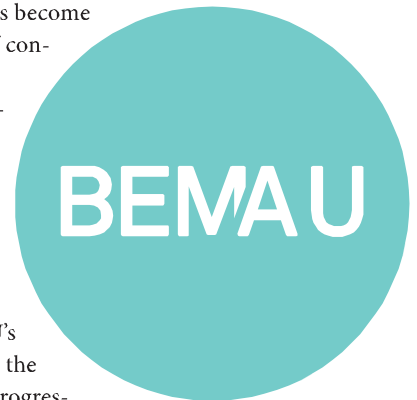
niche learning communities where faces become familiar and a deeper understanding of content can be reached.

Most BEMA-U workshops are designed as one- or two-day singular events. They're what many people would expect when attending a standard workshop: Take in a good amount of content in a short amount of time, then attempt application when they return to work. BEMA-U's Transformational Leadership Series is the same concept, but it's a series of three progressive workshops that have been developed to thread the content logically over a few-month period. This allows participants the opportunity to apply what they are learning in the workplace and report back to the group their experiences and observations.

Who should participate in this type of program?

The Transformational Leadership Series is ideal for a wide variety of audiences, including those wanting depth in the topic of leadership development. Additionally, the breadth in industry networking should have a very enriching experience. Because the group will complete all three sessions together, a lasting professional network will be created that will remain long after the last class has ended.

Ideal individuals to participate in this program include management talent, high-potential employees, emerging professionals, mid-level managers, operations managers, human resources and plant management. It is recommended that at least two people from the same company attend to improve collaboration and developmental work between sessions.



Bowers

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Emily Bowers, BEMA

Can a person benefit from attending just one class in the workshop, or is full attendance required?

For this workshop series, full attendance is required at all three sessions. However, BEMA-U does offer several other training courses on a variety of subjects. Workshops are delivered regionally, as well as on-site directly to a company.

What are some immediate, short-term benefits of a cohort?

The professional networking begins immediately in a cohort group, as do the interactive discussions. People typically learn better when working within groups, and a cohort provides the foundation to explore the real content of a subject beyond the surface. After any training session, application must take place for learning to occur. These cohort groups will be motivated and prepared to try new techniques and communication styles on the job and within their new learning community.

What are some of the lasting effects from this as opposed to a one- or two-day workshop?

First, the participants move beyond the networking of a typical class and develop meaningful industry relationships. More than a new connection from a source like social media, this is a network that participants could call on directly.

In this multi-session setting, the group gets to do more than scratch the surface of a topic. They dig a little deeper during each session; they apply what they are learning. They come back to the next session and engage in telling conversations, putting their knowledge and experience on display and grow their ability to collaborate, communicate and, ultimately, lead. A third ben-

efit of this workshop style is that it serves well both the “natural” leader and those leaders who have the skills but might need time to warm up. The natural leader is likely ready to jump into conversation and high levels of interaction right away at a one-day workshop, whereas leaders with a more subdued style might only listen at a one-day workshop rather than engage and find their comfort zone within the group.

How can a baker or supplier bring these skills back into his or her day-to-day operations?

The course is designed so that companies will see an immediate impact. The participants will have specific learning experiences to fold into their normal work environment. These experiences will be a combination of observation, conversation and experimentation. The final session of the class involves the participants soliciting feedback from their coworkers, which is an amazing growth opportunity. The language used in the Insights Discovery model is fun and easy to remember and can transform an organization.

Why did BEMA decide to engage in cohort learning?

BEMA is focused on bringing the baking industry together to provide the highest quality training and development opportunities. A multi-session workshop cohort focused on action and application of skills is an investment of time for companies, and it will pay the highest dividends, both to the company and the baking industry as a whole.

The Workforce Gap in US Commercial Baking study reported that the biggest challenge facing the industry is the lack of skilled workers to fill positions of those senior employees who are retiring, which begs the question, “Are we developing the middle level appropriately?” A cohort learning program provides the opportunity for participants to hone their leadership skills while using practical resources to provide solutions for real workplace challenges. The companies that train will be the companies that retain, and BEMA wants to provide that training. BEMA-U evolved in its infancy, adding both customized on-site training and the cohort workshop model, striving to achieve our goal of meeting the needs of our member companies.

Where will the first workshop be held?

The first series of three courses will be held at Sheraton on the Plaza in Kansas City, MO, and registration is currently open at www.bema.org. Session 1 will take place Oct. 25-26, Session 2 on Dec. 13-14 and Session 3 on Feb. 14-15, 2017. ●