

# UPSKILLING LEADERS AT MARYLAND'S DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL SERVICES

## **CUSTOM PROGRAMMING PARTICIPANTS**

There's a growing trend facing the public sector: a large portion of the workforce is at or nearing retirement age. At one government agency, Maryland Department of General Services (DGS), they are already looking for ways to begin preparing their employees with the essential skills required for transitioning into critical leadership roles within the agency. DGS has invested in a solution that already shows early promise: leadership training provided by the Dr. Nancy Grasmick Leadership Institute.

"We reached out to the Institute with two goals. We realized that we needed help with succession planning," says Tonya Sturdivant, director of the office of human resources at DGS. "We wanted our current leaders to focus on ways they could upskill their teams to better prepare them for the next level. That way, when our current leaders transition to something different or retire, we are prepared."

DGS' second goal stemmed from a need to address the results of a recent employee survey conducted by Towson University. DGS recognized an opportunity to enhance relationships between employees and supervisors, aiming to boost productivity, create a positive work environment, and ultimately retain talent.

"Our leaders' relationships with their team members have a big impact on our retention and succession planning. We wanted to equip our leaders with the ability to communicate, mentor and coach their staff to help our employees to be happy, productive and that everyone has a great work experience," Sturdivant explains.

To address these two goals, the Institute proposed a training plan that would reach leaders throughout the agency.

"The goal was to make sure that every leader, anyone who is responsible for people in any capacity, would go through the training," explains Sturdivant. "The Institute recommended that we use the cascading effect, starting with our executives and cascade down throughout the organization. We wanted to show that if executives can commit to a two day training, everybody else can. Our approach had three tiers. The first tier was the executive team, the second tier were mid-level leadership managers and directors, and our third tier were our frontline supervisors. We were able to work with the Institute to customize each session to provide content that was appropriate for the level in which they operated."

The response from DGS employees has been extremely positive.

"At the end of each session, participants share their reflections about what they learned and appreciated. I often sit in the back and take notes," shares Chichi Nyagah-Nash, chief operating officer. "When I read through my team members' reflections, some of the words they share include feeling 'enriched, engaged, committed, optimistic, enjoyment, surprised, enlightened, motivated, hopeful, energized and grateful.' Actually, I see that word "grateful" over and over in their feedback, grateful to learn, grateful to have DGS invest in their professional growth, and grateful to feel seen."

Even better, the Institute's leadership training is already having an impact in achieving DGS' goals to improve employee retention and upskill mid-level leaders for better succession planning. Further, Sturdivant believes that better employee training may be a key to curbing the trend of attrition that is currently impacting most public sector organizations.

"I've been working over 25 years in HR within Maryland state agencies," says Sturdivant. "I am hopeful that the success of the Institute's programs will get other agencies across the state to start talking about the importance of continuous learning and be more proactive in their approach to leadership. I hope they see the benefit that comes from really pouring into our own state employees so that they're able to learn, grow and thrive."

## TESTIMONIALS

### Tonya Sturdivant

DGS recently had the opportunity to partner with the Dr. Nancy Gramick Leadership Institute to enhance our skills and tools necessary to become effective leaders at all levels of the agency. The skillful facilitators provided an interactive environment that allowed us to learn new techniques and exchange ideas with our fellow participants. This was a great experience that exceeded our expectations and we are thankful for an outstanding learning experience.

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### Video Interview Questions for Chichi and Tonya for Monday, August 5:

1. What is your name and role with Maryland Department of Government Services?
2. Can you briefly share what DGS does and how its work serves Marylanders?
3. Why did you reach out to the Institute to inquire about leadership training?
4. What outcomes did you hope the trainings would help your employees achieve?
5. What has been the response from your team: what do they appreciate about the training?
6. Have you observed or heard of employees whose work has been positively impacted by what they learned from the Institute?
7. What did you personally learn from the leadership training?
8. If you were to recommend the Dr. Nancy Gramick Leadership Institute to a colleague, what would you say?
9. Succession planning is not just a concern for DGS, but I’ve heard that many public sector organizations struggle with recruiting and equipping the next level of leadership. Can you expand the lens wider, to speak generally about how leadership training could be a solution for other Maryland and government organizations?
10. For Chichi: You often sat in at the end of each session to hear the participants’ reflections. I understand you wrote down a lot of those words. Can you share some of the words participants used to describe how they felt after the training session?
11. For Tonya: You’re able to retire after 30 years of public service! Thank you! And as you reflect about your career, why do you think great, ethical, trustworthy leaders at the helm of our public agencies is important? Dr. Gramick always says, “Leadership Always Matters.” Why does great leadership matter?

