



Courtesy of Automotive Fuel Cell Cooperation Corp. (AFCC)

Fueling Change at AFCC

Established in 2008, AFCC Automotive Fuel Cell Cooperation Corp. is a joint venture of Daimler AG and Ford Motor Company developing fuel cell modules for automotive applications. The organization has a threefold mission: to develop a fuel cell stack for vehicles that meets cost targets, to develop innovative stack concepts and technologies for next-generation fuel cell vehicles, and to own fuel cell stack product design from “cradle to grave.”

Since 2012, the organization has been applying the same spirit of innovation that drives its product development strategy to its talent development strategy by building a robust coaching culture that directly impacts everyone associated with AFCC, from leaders and managers at the upper echelons of the organization to new hires, co-op students and outside contractors.

In recognition of AFCC’s fully integrated coaching culture, the International Coach Federation (ICF) named the organization a winner of the 2017 ICF International Prism Award. The Prism Award program honors organizations that have achieved the highest standard of excellence in coaching programs that yield discernible and measurable positive impacts, fulfill rigorous professional standards, address key strategic goals, and shape organizational culture. (Learn more at Coachfederation.org/prism.)

Committed to Professionalism

In 2012, AFCC’s head of human resources, Glenn St. Onge, sought out coach training for himself as the first step toward building a coaching culture in the organization. (St. Onge went on to obtain an ICF Professional Certified Coach Credential and was the coach who nominated AFCC for a Prism Award.) He enrolled in The Coaches Training Institute’s ICF-accredited coach training program and added internal coaching to his job responsibilities. In 2014, to further expand the program and manage the significant number of internal coaching requests, AFCC approved the addition of a second internal coach. It was then that

Reza Rahmani, an AFCC engineer, transferred into HR and enrolled in ICF-accredited coach training. With two trained coaches in place by late 2015, the pair worked together to grow and expand the company’s coaching and leadership programs.

Since then, AFCC has invested in 60 hours of coach-specific training for 23 managers and leaders across the organization. This group included 80 percent of the senior management team and 50 percent of extended management. This year, the organization is offering mini-workshops, triads and coaching supervision opportunities for individuals who have completed coach-specific training; continuing monthly “coaches’ corner” meetings to help refine and grow the coaching program; and investing in coach-specific training for 25 additional team members.

Coaching, Everywhere

Coaching is embedded in every aspect of AFCC’s culture, St. Onge says. “Coaching takes place throughout the day; there’s always a coaching conversation underway somewhere in the company.” All employees, co-op students and contractors are eligible to participate in coaching, and all new hires are assigned coaches as part of their onboarding process. In addition to formal coaching engagements—which 50 percent of employees have participated in since 2013—coach-like conversations take place regularly during one-on-one and team meetings. “Coaching language, such as, ‘What level of listening are you at?’ or, ‘What perspective are you standing in?’ has been integrated into our everyday language,” St. Onge says.

AFCC credits coaching with driving a 161 percent improvement in leadership culture from 2014–2017. Specific dimensions that saw the greatest improvements included authenticity (389 percent), relating (228 percent), self-awareness (182 percent), achieving (167 percent) and systems awareness (151 percent). “The improvement in authenticity demonstrates leaders are showing up more fully, not masked by organizational politics, looking good or winning approval,” St. Onge says. “They take tough stands, bring up ‘un-discussables’ and openly deal with relationship issues.”

Since coaching was implemented employee turnover at AFCC has decreased by 48 percent, for a cost savings of \$700,000 USD annually. The number of employee relations issues has been cut in half, for an

HR cost savings of \$160,000 USD. Employees who have participated in coaching have credited it with supporting their transitions into leadership roles, strengthening their teams and enhancing their interpersonal skills inside and outside of the office.

In a testimonial, one AFCC employee writes, “As a new leader, coaching helped me identify my strengths and gaps, successfully resolve conflicts, and deliver and accept critical feedback. Prior to coaching, I was prone to avoiding issues and not voicing my opinions, and I was unaware of my impact on others.” Another manager at AFCC—who has since completed coach training—writes, “I partnered with an internal coach at a very low point in my career. Quite frankly, I was ready to leave the company. ... My coach helped me discover my values and life purpose, and even create my crew. I was skeptical at first whether coaching would have any impact on me. When I look back, I know the only reason I’m here today is because of my coach and the learning and new perspectives I was able to generate through coaching. Three years later, I’ve been promoted into a senior role and I am happy and engaged. Coaching works!”

The ripple effect of coaching at AFCC has caused its parent companies to take notice. Two employees of the parent companies have partnered with AFCC internal coaches and shared positive feedback regarding the experience. In 2016, AFCC was awarded Ford Motor Company’s prestigious Diversity and Inclusion Award in the Strengthening External Partnerships category.

A Strategic Imperative

Coaching was introduced to AFCC as an element of the strategic plan for HR. Today, it’s a cornerstone of the organization’s overarching strategic plan.

The organization funds coach-specific training and



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continuous professional development opportunities for internal coach practitioners, and in 2017 the senior leadership team made a commitment to strategically track and sustain AFCC’s coaching culture.

AFCC has a dedicated budget in place for coaching and leadership development efforts. The organization is also investing in enhancing the infrastructure for coaching, including upgrades to an internal coaching website for coaches and employees that contains relevant information, forms and resources. Finally, they are exploring ways to further integrate coaching into a variety of talent development programs and initiatives, including annual development and performance reviews, leadership development offerings, on-boarding and off-boarding programs, goal-setting, and career development.

“At AFCC, hydrogen is the element that powers our fuel cell technology and coaching is the human element that fuels our leaders and employees to be the best they can be,” St. Onge says. “Coaching has changed our company’s DNA.”

The International Coach Federation (ICF) is dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high ethical standards, providing independent certification and building a worldwide network of credentialed coaches across a variety of coaching disciplines. ICF is active in representing all facets of the coaching industry, including Executive, Life Vision and Enhancement, Leadership, Relationship, and Career Coaching. Its 26,000-plus members located in more than 130 countries* work toward the common goal of enhancing awareness of coaching, upholding the integrity of the profession, and continually educating themselves with the newest research and practices.

**Numbers as of August 2017. Numbers are subject to change month to month.*



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