

The Chemistry of Relationship Management

Background: Irving Oil (Irving) is one of today's leading regional energy companies supplying wholesale, commercial, and retail customers throughout Eastern Canada, Quebec, and New England. Focused on energy processing, transporting, and marketing, Irving is widely known for its commitment to customer service, environmental awareness, and contributions to the communities in which it operates.



Since it was founded as a single gas station in 1924 in Boutouche, New Brunswick, the company has expanded into refining oil and increasing gas station locations with Irving's own creation of accompanying convenience stores throughout Eastern Canada and the U.S. The company is still owned by the original Irving family with the third generation now poised to take control. The growth of Irving through the last 80 years has been steady and can be attributed to the sharp business sense of the company's leaders.

Challenge: Entelechy was presented with a unique and exciting challenge from Irving: create a training program to support an organization-wide initiative to teach the entire workforce how to accomplish their business goals when working with internal and external people who don't report to them. The message was clear and the direction set. It needed to be more than a relationship management program – although learning to strengthen relationships was a key objective – a mindset shift was necessary. Irving executives, managers, and employees needed to call upon influence and persuasion as tools to motivate change in others.

Working with a specially created project team comprised of leaders within the organization, Entelechy approached the data gathering stage of the development process from several different directions. First, existing training was reviewed to provide a clear understanding of Irving's core training programs to determine what could be leveraged with this new program. Next, a review of internal 360° survey feedback provided a rare insight into the current mindset of Irving employees and how they viewed their relationships with their internal and external partners. Lastly, focus groups with leaders, key stakeholders, and targeted employees were conducted to complete the data gathering phase. Invaluable information was gleaned from this three-pronged approach and gave Entelechy a solid foundation from which to build a relationship management program to exceed Irving's expectations.

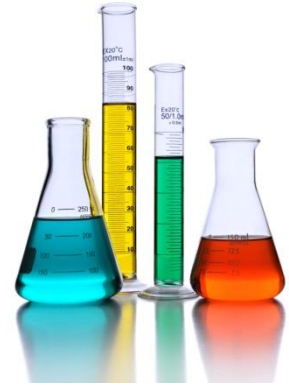
As a result of the collaborative efforts of Entelechy and Irving, *The Chemistry of Relationship Management* was born!

Solution: In order for this program to have far-reaching success, it needed to be different. Entelechy's approach was to develop a unique theme that would tie the nebulous and hard to define relationship aspect of business to performance. Using a creative chemistry theme, Entelechy was able to take the imprecise science of

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relationships and apply practical and proven methods, models, and techniques designed to help strengthen and influence Irving's internal and external relationships. After all, relationship management does involve chemistry – the chemistry between people that, when examined from a logical, unemotional place can produce amazing results.

The Chemistry of Relationship Management trains employees at each level of the organization to build productive, meaningful relationships with both internal and external partners through influence, communication, and an understanding of the diverse styles that make up the organization. Through the practical application of the concepts, participants can use their new skills to influence others to accomplish both their team and organizational goals.



The components of *The Chemistry of Relationship Management* program include:

- *Identification of a Key Breakthrough Opportunity (KBO):* A focal point of the program; each participant's KBO represents a significant opportunity for them to practice their enhanced skills on a business relationship that is challenging, or that needs strengthening. Participants are directed to choose a relationship that, if enhanced, would have a significant business impact to themselves and Irving.
- *Skills Self-Assessment:* An Entelechy custom-designed self-assessment designed to provide participants with a snapshot of their personal relationship management skills, including strengths and areas of opportunity.
- *Training:* Two instructor-led workshops delivered over a period of two to four months. The first workshop establishes the core concepts, skills, tools, and models of the program using experiential learning activities and real-life examples and scenarios. The second workshop builds upon the concepts, skills, tools, and models established in the first workshop, while deepening the concepts with additional activities. Throughout both workshops there is an emphasis on applying the knowledge learned to each participant's KBO.
- *Interim Assignments:* Between the two workshops, interim assignments provided an opportunity for the participants to apply and hone the skills learned in the training.
- *Reinforcement Activities:* A library of activities designed to support and reinforce the concepts and skills from the program keeps *The Chemistry of Relationship Management* alive at Irving.

The Chemistry of Relationship Management included hands-on, experiential learning through the following:

- Use of real-world scenarios and examples to build competence and confidence in the use of the models and techniques.



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- Completion of the Learning Action Booklet (LAB) by each participant to set goals and plan specific on-the-job application of the skills and techniques learned in the training.
- A creative leadership simulation experienced as an interactive challenge where behaviors and insights are applied to participant's specific relationship challenges.
- Experiential activities, demonstrations, and topic-related videos are incorporated to bring the learning to life and ensure key learning and implementation.

Results: Feedback on the application of the skills learned in *The Chemistry of Relationship Management* has been overwhelmingly positive at all levels within Irving. People continue to work with their original – and new – KBOs to strengthen the relationship. Existing and new partnerships are producing results that are measurable and meaningful. The ability to influence without authority has enabled business goals to be reached and created a collaborative culture where the diversity of the internal and external individuals is embraced and used to produce results.

Irving's new relationship-focused culture and language has formed strong, collaborative relationships with internal and external business partners resulting in effective communication and efficient work strategies – a validation of the importance of the relationship in the business partnership. The comments shared by both senior leadership and front-line staff prove that *The Chemistry of Relationship Management* is a huge success:

"Just want to thank you for your hard work and dedication...the product you turned out was exceptional! I have been a part of 5 other Sales and Relationship training courses ranging from 2 days to 12 weeks (Xerox, Canon, London Life, Miller Heiman etc.) and this I feel has provided as much or likely more value than any of these past courses. All of the feedback thus far has been extremely positive and just my observation that people are using the concepts and working so hard on their Key Breakthrough Opportunities is great to see...We appreciate the simplicity of the model and how having a common framework and language will promote consistency among our leaders."

– Steve Foot, Fleet Operations Manager

"Entelechy plays much 'bigger' than you are; you should all be very proud of the accomplishments of your group of seven, it is world class."

– Marc Newman, Director of Human Resources

"Great workshop — great tools — great ideas!"

– Program Participant

"I am a champion advocate for this program!"

– Program Participant