



# CaseStudy

## Schwan's Global Supply Chain at CLO Forum: Building a peer network to brainstorm & share best practices, all year long



One-on-One Meetings

### **Specific challenges, short and long-term solutions:**

Sorenson, who directs training and development for Schwan's Global Supply Chain, came to the Forum with several specific challenges in mind. "For example, I was concerned about getting to the next level with leadership development. I wanted to improve transfer of knowledge from classroom to workforce. I wanted to strengthen our frontline training, especially given the number of languages our employees speak. And I wanted to improve training for 'hard' skills, to overcome the large skills gap I see coming over the next few years."



Workshop



Conference

At the Forum, he found promising solutions for many of these problems, and has already started working with several of the suppliers he met there. Within months, for example, he was already utilizing ready-built tools and templates for organizational development from gOE, The Group for Organizational Effectiveness. And he quickly piloted Bovo-Tighe's job profiling pre-assessments to drive better talent in crucial production supervisory roles.

*Richmond Events' CLO & Talent Management Forum has helped Steve Sorenson build a working group of trusted colleagues across multiple industries: peers that now rely on each other year-round for help with their most crucial strategic challenges.*

As beneficial as these suppliers have been, though, he found something even more valuable at this year's Forum: a team of peers that is continuing to help each other all year long.

### **Year-round brainstorming starting at the Forum:**

"At my tables over lunch and dinner, my colleagues and I were able to start talking about some of our challenges – and many of them were similar. We shared business cards and talked afterwards. I emailed eight of these individuals, suggesting that we put together a group to share best practices: what's working well for each of us, ideas we could all learn from."

Sorenson's "sharing group" has already addressed a wide spectrum of issues, from onboarding to talent management. And, he says, it's proven especially valuable in helping him support Schwan's journey towards lean processes.

### **Building your own group: how to make it work:**

Sorenson encourages other Forum delegates to organize their own year-





Mealtime Meetings



Speed Meetings



Conference

round “sharing groups” with colleagues they meet at the event.

**Based on his experience, he offers some helpful ground rules:**

1. “First, keep it small. We’ve found that eight people is the perfect size; ten would be the maximum
2. Choose people from non-competing industries: if a new company wants to join, make sure there are no conflicts of interest
3. Be clear about what everyone wants to accomplish
4. Identify a set of topics for the year, and choose a point person to lead each session
5. Distribute an agenda in advance -and allow time to go beyond best practices to brainstorming.”

Beyond regularly scheduled meetings, Sorenson says, his group also leaves room for online brainstorming conversations – for example, to support individuals who’ve just been asked to lead new initiatives, and need ideas to hit the ground running.

**Great people, open discussion, multiple perspectives:**

Could Sorenson have built a group like this if he hadn’t attended the CLO & Talent Management Forum? At best, it would have been far more difficult.

“In other venues, the sharing is more guarded. You can’t just throw something out there. From the conference and meals to meetings and networking events, the Forum’s small, tight-knit groups give you an opportunity to judge character, and learn whether you really trust someone. If after several minutes you’re still talking about the weather, your intuition is telling you, ‘this isn’t a person I’ll ever share company specific information with.’”

Since the Forum brings together leaders from many industries, Sorenson says, it exposes him to ideas he’d never

see at an industry-specific event. And, since most people he meets at the Forum aren’t competitors, they can be far more open about their plans and problems.

“There are plenty of industry events, and there’s benefit in those. But when you’re talking about learning or leadership development, people in the insurance and automotive industries are facing the same problems as I am. And sometimes, other industries seem further ahead in solving them. I purposely stepped outside my comfort zone, and it paid off. For example, I met healthcare people who’ve already solved many of the same problems I’m encountering.”

“I work for a great organization. We believe we have some of the best and brightest people around. But, like anyone else, we get siloed; we have our own sacred cows. At the Forum, people ask me questions I never would have thought of. ‘Why don’t you try this? What about that?’ And I’ll think, ‘gosh, that’s a great idea. Even though I thought I had a best practice, I’ve just learned something to make my program even better.’”

The CLO & Talent Management Forum is specifically designed to address the growing needs and demands of senior executives who oversee workforce learning and development. In 2013, held at the luxurious Phoenician in Scottsdale, AZ, it provides a unique environment for senior learning and development executives to expand their professional and personal skill sets, source innovative new services and solutions, and network with leadership colleagues facing similar challenges.

For more information e-mail Jordan Iseral at [Jiseral@richmondevents.com](mailto:Jiseral@richmondevents.com)