



A Feather in Your Cap: The LDP Capstone Project

The NAED's Leadership Development Program and its signature "Capstone Project" offer great opportunities for personal and professional growth.



Introduction

Since launching in January 2020, NAED's Leadership Development Program (LDP) – a 10-month curriculum uniquely designed to develop leaders in the electrical distribution industry – has successfully prepared nearly 100 distributor and manufacturing individuals for greater levels of responsibility and success. Offering everything from personal leadership assessments to instruction in best leadership practices, training in communication styles, one-on-one coaching, networking opportunities, and more, the LDP also features another signature element – a several month-long "Capstone Project" enabling participants to tackle a specific issue, process, or program that can benefit their company.

LDP participants' Capstone Projects have focused on everything from finance to logistics, organizational, and marketing/sales-related initiatives, and LDP graduates have raved about the unique opportunity to help lead and contribute to their company's success.

Below, four graduates of the LDP discuss their specific Capstone Projects and how the Leadership Development Program and Capstone opportunity helped them grow both personally and professionally:





Stokes Electric: Focusing Employees on KPI

Company Issue/Need:

The demands of keeping up with day-to-day business disconnected employees from some of the key performance targets they need to strive for

Scope of Capstone Project:

An initiative to meet with and refocus key employee personnel on company KPIs and strategies for achieving them

“With our business and employees always going so fast and furious, it’s easy to take your eye off the ball and forget about our goals and the resources that are out there to help achieve them, so my Capstone Project was about refocusing jobs,” shared LDP graduate Bob Stokes, executive vice president of Knoxville, TN-based Stokes Electric, which has four branches and nearly 70 employees. “I identified six criteria of importance to our company – including maintaining good stock levels, ensuring appropriate inventory turns, collecting receivables, and leveraging technology – and then met with nearly a dozen of our key decision-makers to discuss how they could better support our key performance indicators (KPIs).”

Since completing his Capstone Project, “we’ve improved several things, including enhancing efficiency by installing GPS technology to help route our trucks,” Stokes said. “But even more than that, I think that our employees appreciated the opportunity to sit down and talk with one of the company’s owners because it showed that we care about them and are interested in their jobs and performance.”

“I especially loved learning about strategies for communicating with different types of people,” Stokes said of the LDP experience, “and my Capstone Project was a great opportunity to get down to the grassroots level with our employees, who proved that they’re extremely dedicated and want to do a good job. It was a project that had been started at our company but never finished, so the Capstone enabled me to do something for our company that we wouldn’t have been able to make time for on our own.”

Overall, Stokes concluded, “the LDP was a tremendous learning experience and I met so many people from all over the country. It was great to be in such a positive environment where you can share ideas openly.”



Service Wire: Enhancing Employee Product Training

Company Issue/Need:

The company's training program for new employees had opportunities for improvement

Scope of Capstone Project:

Creation of a committee that reworked training modules for easier comprehension and greater alignment with the company's processes

For her Capstone Project, LDP graduate Kerith Richards, regional sales manager for Culloden, WV-based Service Wire, chose to revamp her company's existing training policy. Specifically, "I created a committee to re-design the training around our company's six-module 'Wire and Cable 101' series," she said.

"This initiative was important to our company because, while we've been fortunate to hire more candidates with excellent sales skills, some may not have been as experienced in the electrical industry," Richards explained. "This new training program has helped us track their progress and understanding, teach wire and cable at a more digestible level, and blend the product training with our manufacturing process." As a result of the committee's launch, "we've been able to improve training processes, employee retention of both product information and company procedures, and identify and address any breakdowns," she said. "Since operating under the new training program, new employees are taking on territories faster than previously assigned and have a greater understanding of the technical aspects of our cable. All of our sales team is eager to continuously grow, learn, and be the best resource for our customers and the new program helps us provide quality training faster and with better results."

"Overall, I'm thrilled that Service Wire allowed me to take part in the LDP," Richards confirmed. "On top of the skills that I practice daily to make me a better leader for our sales team, I've made so many great friends and resources in the industry through the program."



Schneider Electric: Capitalizing on Infrastructure Opportunities with Channel Partners

Company Issue/Need:

Preparing and positioning distribution partners to capitalize on new federally-driven infrastructure initiatives and funding

Scope of Capstone Project:

Creation of a Channel Action Plan to help position partners to win opportunities stemming from federal spending

According to LDP graduate Danielle Gollenberg, manager of Channel Enablement for Schneider Electric, there are outstanding opportunities to help improve the nation's infrastructure with a focus on sustainability. "We want to position ourselves and our partners to benefit from this once-in-a-lifetime funding," she said. "For my Capstone Project, I worked with our Government Relations and Water teams to build a Channel Action Plan that includes training, lobbying, relationship-building, and business development with the goal of selecting our most-ready partners to join us on this journey to better support local projects and build a more sustainable future together."

Through her project, "we've had several discussions with various distributor partners to build interest in and excitement for this unique opportunity," Gollenberg said. "We're then sharing this information with our partners to determine ways of capitalizing on these opportunities and positioning them to win."

Overall, "the LDP offered a unique environment to learn alongside existing Schneider partners, industry-adjacent manufacturers, and even competitors, which allowed for thoughtful and honest dialogue about the state of our industry, the common challenges we each face, and what we can do as growing leaders to reimagine the future of electrical distribution," Gollenberg concluded. "Culminating with our Capstone Projects, we each brought back to our company new perspectives, a toolbox of leadership skills, and disruptive ideas that will help our companies be better positioned to take on the active recovery we've been, and will continue to be, facing."



East Coast-Based Distributor: Streamlining the Processing and Communication of Price Increases

Company Issue/Need:

Manufacturer price increases weren't being processed or communicated as efficiently as possible and could "fall through the cracks" internally

Scope of Capstone Project:

Creation of a stronger internal process for processing and communicating price increases

With the volume and frequency of manufacturer price increases ballooning over the past several years and occupying a greater share of their team's energy, this LDP graduate's Capstone Project involved a review of their department's processes surrounding manufacturer price increases. Specifically, "I wanted to ensure that we had improved visibility to manufacturer price increase activity, were processing those changes efficiently, were regularly notifying relevant parties of changes, and that the analytical tools were available to identify opportunities as they arose," the graduate shared.

Working cross-functionally with supply chain and sales organizations to make information more available to all, "we experienced improvements in our communication and tracking capabilities fairly quickly," shared the graduate, who noted that work to develop and refine appropriate analytical tools remains ongoing. "We've streamlined a number of steps in the processing and communication of manufacturer price increases that have resulted in labor savings within our department and greater sales department awareness concerning the breadth of upcoming price increases. In addition, the frequency and quality of communication between our pricing and purchasing teams has improved and fewer price increases are falling through the cracks."

Overall, "the LDP provided a fantastic forum to share ideas with and learn alongside peers from a variety of backgrounds, functional areas, and steps in the distribution value stream, and the LDP's Capstone Project in particular provides an avenue to undertake work that's more strategic than might otherwise have been available to me," the graduate said. "With executive support, I was able to carve out time to 'work on the business' in areas of importance to our department and company."

For more information:

NAED's next LDP cohort begins in 2025 and enrollment is now open! If you're interested in attending or sending individuals from your company, please contact memberengagement@naed.org.

For more information about a customized program for your company, please contact Catherine Viglione at cviglione@naed.org or Kitty Lasinski at klasinski@naed.org.

