

DON'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS NOSE RING

If you have a fashion-forward teenager (or shop for one) you have probably heard of Hot Topic, a highly successful mall-based retail chain that specializes in clothing, accessories, gifts, and music. Hot Topic's motto is "everything about the music" and the merchandise reflects a variety of trendy music-related lifestyles including punk, club and gothic. It's not a typical mall store, and neither are the employees.

At first glance, HR professionals might not think of the tattooed, body-pierced salespeople and store managers as candidates for corporate advancement. Hot Topic management believes otherwise, and with the help of Milestones, Inc. they have created a leadership program to develop the district managers, executives and other leaders they need to supervise the chain's rapid growth.

Hot Topic believes in a fair and developmental environment for all employees, and is committed to promotion from within. "Development is a company-wide goal," says Jane Cruz, Hot Topic's senior vice president of human resources. "Our plan is to grow our people fast enough to stay ahead of our very hot growth rate. That's why all of our directors, vice-presidents and senior vice-presidents are going through leadership training."



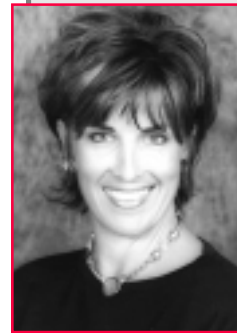
Milestones Performance Management System

1. Assess
2. Recommend
3. Implement
4. Reinforce

Services

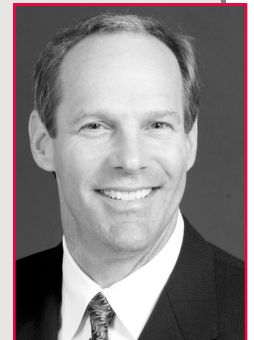
- Coaching
- Team Building
- Strategic Planning
- Sales Management Consulting
- Training in
 - Leadership
 - Communication
 - Customer Service
 - Sales

Milestones



Madelon and Brett are presenting a seminar on communication styles, sponsored by the British American Business Council, on a Princess Cruise trip from Vancouver to San Pedro September 18-21.

Brett attended the Chairman's Club of Target Training International in Philadelphia July 19th. The Chairman's Club is comprised of distributors with special expertise and success in using assessment tools to assist people in their personal and organizational development.



HONOR THEIR IDENTITIES

Cruz had previously worked with Milestones, Inc. at Universal Television, and she again sought Madelon Miles' expertise to develop a leadership program that built on Hot Topic's in-house operations training. Senior management knew Madelon had a reputation for not prejudging clients. "After the first half-hour of the program, I didn't even notice the nose rings any more," says Madelon. "And they've become one of my favorite clients."

Madelon's approach was informed by Hot Topic's "open culture" that respects individuality and honors initiative. She built on this strong foundation

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mile•stone \ mī(ə)l -stōn \ 1: a stone set to measure distance, indicating progress toward desired goals.

Milestones, Inc.

Developing individuals and organizations one milestone at a time

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by speaking candidly about the goals of the three-day program and her role in facilitating learning. She explained that leadership is more than a technique, it's an attitude to be lived and used outside the company as well.

Many of Hot Topic's employees are young people who feel they "don't fit in" elsewhere, so it was important to honor their identities. The development work began with individual assessments to help participants understand their own styles and motivations. Coaching and performance management were also discussed, especially how to help team members accept advice without making them defensive.

BUDDIES FOR REINFORCEMENT

Interactive exercises played an important role. Participants worked through such simulations as how to welcome an "apprehensive suburban Mom on her first trip to Hot Topic" and make her comfortable shopping there. The sessions finished with presentation skills, with each participant preparing a two-minute "standup speech." What might have been intimidating at the beginning of the workshop became a profound experience. "People made major shifts in how they saw themselves, as well as how they interacted with their team members," says Madelon. "It got very emotional as people shared how important this was for them."

The training is being reinforced by a telephone buddy system teaming participants who work at different stores and even in different states. "Many of our people said it was the most valuable training they ever had," says Cruz. "They bonded and learned how to work with others and be effective."

The program's success reinforced Madelon's and Hot Topic's belief that if you can't see beyond appearances or limit people because of their age or experience, employees will probably meet your low expectations. But if you accept them and challenge them, they can take a "cool job" and make it a career. It's an attitude management everywhere can adopt to motivate people to give their best for any organization. In fact, that's leadership.

**To Help Others Find Answers,
Ask Questions**

Coaching is often thought of as a way to help a person who needs "fixing." This attitude, however, will usually produce wrong results, such as the person being coached becoming dependent on the coach, which can promote feelings of helplessness.

TIP A person can often find the answers if you help him ask the right questions. He needs to think through the problem to learn that he can solve it. Coach from that attitude. You will build the person's confidence and help him own the answers.

EXAMPLE Ned tells you "I'm having trouble gaining the trust of Jill, my co-worker. What should I do?" You coach Ned by asking such questions as: How does Jill feel about you? Have you talked to Jill about trusting you? What are her concerns? You have the trust of other co-workers; how was that trust earned? What could you do that would show Jill that you trust her? What are you asking Jill to trust you about?

Ask powerful questions that help people find their own solutions and you help people help themselves.

Coaches help athletes achieve top performance. Today, more and more managers and professionals rely on coaching skills to get top performance from their teams. In each issue, the Coach's Clipboard brings you valuable coaching insights.

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