



CASE STUDY

Humana: Using Whole Brain® Thinking to Support New Teams, Sales Growth, and Social Impact



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HBDI® PREFERENCE CODE: 2 3 1 1



Executive Summary


“I think the biggest thing that I’ve been a fan of over the years is the fluidity of the actual model,” DeNure says. “When you think about the neuroscience behind how we actually learn things, that’s the [concept] I take a lot of my use cases from using the Whole Brain® Model. Those main principles transcend any business, person, or team.”

Humana has undergone significant change management in recent years by focusing on core product lines, acquiring new organizations, and forming new teams. To ensure consistent messaging across teams, especially in sales, Humana emphasized cognitive diversity through the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument® (HBDI®) and Whole Brain® Thinking.

These efforts were led by Deb DeNure, Humana’s associate director, organizational effectiveness, sales learning, and performance. She’s a longtime practitioner of Whole Brain® Thinking, including in her consulting work. DeNure saw the value of Whole Brain® Thinking

to support change management, build trust, and improve the sales team’s understanding of the buyer’s experience. During the pandemic, this approach also proved useful in helping salespeople shift to a virtual sales strategy.

Humana has also succeeded with Whole Brain® Thinking in its work with Project Pinnacle, a mandatory, one-year in-court program for first-time, nonviolent offenders ages 17 to 25. The Whole Brain® Thinking model helped these young adults rethink how to contribute to the community, continue their education, and find employment.

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Objectives

The Whole Brain experience at Humana starts with taking the HBDI® and undergoing individual and team debriefs. Even when taking multiple tests over time, “the one thing that was consistent is their HBDI® profiles,” DeNure says.

“So they’d talk about their new team, what they brought, what their strengths are, the things they’re frustrated with, how they wanted to collaborate, how do they communicate, how do they problem solve?” DeNure continues. “And we would use those same things and same themes through every new organizational change.”

Whole Brain® Thinking provides a foundation of trust and psychological safety. This impact is seen in how Humana runs meetings through critical questions associated with each Whole Brain® quadrant. “Why are we meeting? What are we meeting about? How are we going to work together as a group? How are we going to get this done?” DeNure says. “We definitely use the entire walkaround model as our standard of practice when we go into these meetings.”

Humana also uses Whole Brain® Thinking in its community partnerships, such as with the Georgia-based social justice program Project Pinnacle. Judge Asha Jackson is the founder and

presiding judge of Project Pinnacle, a mandatory, one-year, in-court program for first-time, nonviolent offenders between the ages of 17 to 25.

The mission of Project Pinnacle is to teach young people charged in DeKalb and Cobb County Superior Court about career development, critical thinking, and life skills that will allow them to be the best version of themselves.

Project Pinnacle believes that using evidence-based concepts and helping participants develop supportive resources will lead to them becoming upstanding, productive, and contributing members of society.



Challenges

DeNure notes that Humana wanted to change the sales focus, particularly for the ancillary business, and create a better cohesion between new teams. Humana employees are assigned to teams rather than choosing them. As a result, Humana needed a solution that helped employees engage, collaborate, and build trust despite differences and a lack of familiarity.

Humana had seen tremendous shifts in its business. Over 18 months, 70% of its leaders were new to the company. The company was also exiting certain lines of business and focusing on core areas, which affected the sales approach.

In Humana’s work with Project Pinnacle, the company wanted to help these nonviolent offenders complete the program. In particular, Humana wanted to help these young adults better understand their decision-making and emotional responses so they could avoid the decisions that led to past mistakes.





Solutions

DeNure saw Whole Brain® Thinking as a foundational way to help the sales team understand themselves, the sales cycle, and the buyer process. “We didn’t have a diagnostic tool to understand our salespeople in just how they think about things,” she says.

DeNure introduced Humana to the Whole Brain® Thinking Model to create a more dynamic learning program. That initial success created the opportunity to use the model as a more holistic approach to sales training and team development.

Humana used Whole Brain® Thinking to help salespeople understand what buyers wanted from conversations and how to meet them where they are. This proved especially helpful when the COVID-19 pandemic forced teams to sell virtually.

“It showed them how to listen for the clues, to listen to the words and understand where the person is coming from,” DeNure says.

DeNure also applied the Whole Brain® Thinking Model and HBDI® assessments to Humana’s community work with Project Pinnacle. Participants “take the HBDI® assessment as the first team-building event. We use it for them

to get to know each other because they’re going to be in this program for a year,” DeNure says. “We use it from the approach of how they make decisions, especially when they’re under stress.”

Humana’s Health Equity and Social Impact team helps facilitate the in-court sessions covering Whole Brain® Thinking, emotional intelligence, and personal branding, with an emphasis on interviewing skills and career goals. Cognitive behavioral change is a core principle of the 12 in-court sessions.

Participants are confronted with psycho-social behaviors and responses that have proven detrimental to their success in society. This helps them better understand their responses to people, places, and situations. The Whole Brain® Thinking model also helps them formulate better responses to solving problems, decision making, communicating, and building relationships.





Results

“When we think about the success of the program, I think we look at the behaviors, as well as the performance. Did learning about how they approach a selling strategy equate to a selling outcome?” DeNure says.

The Whole Brain® Thinking model has become part of Humana’s foundation for building better teams and supporting organizational change. With over 1,000 participating employees, Humana has a wealth of comparative data that illustrates significant team change.

This impact can be seen through Salesforce data and other metrics. Humana’s salespeople learn how to deliver facts while also telling a compelling story “in the language of the customer,” she adds.

One of the benefits Humana realized from the Whole Brain® Thinking approach is time savings. “At least a third of the time, from a selling perspective,” DeNure says, “you would get 15 minutes back, 20 minutes back of an hour by not having to go back and forth on a various sales approach.”

Additionally, implementing the Whole Brain® Thinking Model and HBDI® assessment in Project

Pinnacle has helped program participants better understand their thinking preferences and rethink how they make decisions.

“We use the first few sessions to learn more about each other and how their circumstances may be similar, how they thought about something similar, and how they’re able to change up their thinking,” DeNure says.

Many program participants have moved forward with their lives by getting jobs or going back to school. The graduates are resourceful, and many have obtained employment because of the relationships they’ve developed with the various presenters.

Throughout DeNure’s work, the Whole Brain® Thinking Model helps Humana give leaders and employees a new perspective on how they show up to work.

