

# Helping Leaders Form Deeper Connections by Building Active Listening & Feedback Skills

CASE STUDY



## CLIENT PROFILE & CHALLENGE

Based on operational performance and financial results, Copa Airlines is one of the world’s best-performing airlines. But Copa leaders aren’t resting on their laurels.

Copa serves a large market, the Americas, where air travel is projected to grow faster than the global average. Not only has the company grown rapidly for nearly 2 decades, but in recent years, its workforce has shifted to a younger demographic.

Employee engagement at Copa is generally high. However, one of its 2 culture-based KPIs — Copa’s Leadership Index — wasn’t at optimal levels.

In response, the airline spent 15 months assessing whether its formal leadership behaviors, established more than a decade earlier, were still valid and as effective as they could be.

Copa’s Learning & Development department and Corporate Communications team conducted more than 50 focus groups with employees across all functions and at all organizational levels. They asked employees what behaviors they wanted and expected from leaders. After a deep analysis of that input, Copa established 5 new leadership behaviors. Leaders should:

- Inspire with their work, friendliness, and positivism.
- Live the company’s values, and be a role model at all times.
- Listen and communicate frequently and respectfully.
- Know their people and care about their well-being.
- Guide, develop, and recognize their teams.

Historically, Copa’s leaders have focused on business goals. Now the airline’s leaders would be asked to better connect with the people they lead, helping the airline continue its strong performance.

Copa needed a partner to help implement training that would allow these new leadership attributes to take flight.

**CLIENT:** Copa Airlines

**LOCATION:** Headquartered in Panama, with flights serving the Americas

**SIZE:** 9,500 plus 4,000 contractors



## SOLUTION & RESULTS



As Copa Airlines started to look at potential partners, it encountered its first obstacle: consultants who wanted to redo Copa’s research and analysis.

“Most consultants would want to start with the company strategy, and then they would want to walk us through the entire journey,” says Dominik Rus, Corporate Learning & Development director. “CCL instead acknowledged the analyses we had done and said, ‘You guys did the heavy lifting. Let’s not redo that.’”

We saw the opportunity for a high return on training time by focusing on developing 2 vital skills: active listening and providing feedback. Those 2 skills would cover about 80% of the desired new leadership behaviors.

We partnered with Copa and developed a scalable solution: a half-day workshop that trained leaders in the Situation-Behavior-Impact (SBI) feedback method, which helps people provide useful feedback on positive and negative behaviors. Leaders also received training in active listening, learning to concentrate on what’s being said, fully understand it, respond, and remember. This deeper listening involves understanding facts plus emotions and values, helping leaders better navigate critical conversations.

The first training session included Copa’s CEO direct reports, and some vice presidents. By starting with the senior leadership team and scaling to the rest of the organization, Copa ensured the training would take off within the company’s culture. Training sessions were conducted in Spanish and English, making them accessible to Copa’s diverse, multilingual, multinational workforce.

### BY THE NUMBERS: KEY PEOPLE METRICS

	Before Training	After Training
<b>Organizational Climate</b>	72%	78%
<b>Engagement</b>	75%	82%
<b>Leadership Index</b>	67%	70%

Though we led some initial workshops, a linchpin of the Copa engagement was helping the airline own the process so it could teach and sustain the new leadership skills. CCL trained more than 20 vice presidents and directors from across the airline to deliver the solution.

This train-the-trainer and licensing approach allowed Copa to provide the training to more than 1,000 leaders in less than a year. The fact that most internal trainers were from various functional units — not only Learning & Development — further fueled Copa’s efforts to elevate the new leadership attributes.

Company leaders are confident the leadership index will continue to rise.

“Before, it was all about efficiencies, operational excellence, and profit margins,” Dominik says. Those are still top priorities at Copa, but a new focus has been added: “It’s about people and people and people.”

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Train-the-trainer approach empowers Copa to own the process and makes it scalable and sustainable.
- Leadership attributes are embedded into all people processes: recruiting and selection, onboarding, learning and development, performance management, organizational climate management, recognition programs, and corporate communications.
- Copa licensed CCL content for internal communications to reinforce the new leadership behaviors.

## PARTNER WITH US

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