

# Client Spotlight

## Aral—Germany

The beginning of 2003 ended a period when gas station company Aral had been the subject of several mergers and acquisitions. Inevitably, restructuring had followed in the wake of this time and, in March that year, the company appointed The Ken Blanchard Companies German affiliate Voss+Partner to arrange team-building workshops in the newly formed Fleet Classic Customer Service (FCCS) department, a branch of the company that arranges centralised billing services for corporate clients owning several vehicles. The objective of the workshop was to evaluate both groups as a team and develop them accordingly, so they ultimately acknowledged each other as equal partners who could contribute collectively toward the success of the new department.

Two BHPT workshops were planned for 12–14 participants. Throughout the entire workshop, participants were asked to work as a team, as if they were in a real-life work situation. Training was designed so that the primary focus—apart from introducing the theory of team development and cooperation—was on the development of a “we-spirit”: teams set combined objectives for themselves and team members defined their roles within the team structure. During practical exercises—where having fun was not neglected—they realised that tools for successful cooperation actually function in practice.

“At the beginning of the training the focus was on how a group becomes a team,” says Sylvia Peukert. “We looked at which skills and conditions are needed for a team to achieve the highest level of productivity and then, during practical exercises, participants learnt that smooth functioning collaboration has a very positive effect on the work environment and productivity.”

Building High Performing Teams is based on the Situational Leadership® II development model, and Sylvia reports that the idea that teams should be allowed to develop came as good news to the participants. “It was a kind of ‘aha!’ effect,” she explains. “The understanding that every team must first undergo various development phases before becoming the top team was a great relief to many of the participants. The special characteristics of team performance and team behaviour in different phases were discussed, and the actual performance of the participants was then analysed. Then we looked at nurturing special team skills, such as communication within the team, conflict solving, and making collective decisions. Methods of active listening and giving feedback were introduced to the participants for improving internal communication and steps taken to ensure these tools were used with immediate effect. When the participants realised how simple and effective the use of these communication tools are, they used the new skills with increasing enthusiasm.”

The last training session dealt creatively with taking collective decisions. In this exercise, participants developed a marketing strategy for a very unusual product. They enjoyed the challenge and learnt how to conclude acceptable agreements within a team under time pressure.

**CHALLENGE:** To ensure successful teamwork within a newly formed department

**SOLUTION:** Deliver team-building theory and arrange practical exercises to create an understanding of the importance of developing “we-spirit” among those working within the new department

**APPROACH:** Introduce The Ken Blanchard Companies Building High Performing Teams® (BHPT) training within the setting of “real-life” work situations

## The Payoff

“Thanks to the particularly varied and practical exercises that wove around the exchange of knowledge, participants judged the workshop to be very helpful for their activities,” says Sylvia. “Combined work in small teams encouraged dialogue with one another and added to the fun factor in the training. All things considered, it was an efficient and mainly encouraging event for all, and its success has been reflected in the considerably increased ‘we-spirit’ we wanted. It’s also good to know that what participants tried out successfully during training was retained and used by them once back in their hectic daily schedule. I think this was due in no small part to the ‘in-practice’ orientation of the training and the skills of the Blanchard trainers themselves—they performed very well and convincingly.”

Sylvia Peukert joined the company in April 1993. Head of Department Customer Service in the unit European Fleet Services she is responsible for 24 employees. She was responsible for introducing the team-building workshops, having chosen the Blanchard solution on the recommendation of her boss, who had worked previously with Voss+Partner. One of her priority assignments is to forward and coordinate the staff’s development and the team-building processes. She also takes care of structure and organisation of customer services and keeps the contact going to several service providers of the EFS, for instance, the call center for card-owners.