

Developing
values-based leaders
at one of South Africa's
Largest Retailers

Woolworths has a powerful values-based culture that is cultivated by well-developed leaders who are grown and nurtured from within.

Woolworths South Africa, part of the multinational retail group Woolworths Holdings LTD, offers a unique blend of food, fashion, beauty, homeware, and financial services. They trade across 719 store locations in SA and employ over 33,000 people.

Woolworths is a business driven by values that inform what it stands for and underpins everything it does. Its differentiation is in the unique experiences it offers its customers and its people, in the most responsible way.



Integral to Woolworths' strategy is developing values-based leaders who can create an empowered culture of collaboration within their teams. Managers don't need to have all the answers but should be guided by the company's core values -and their own values – to take the right actions to enhance and elevate the people experience. Living the leadership way is one of the keys to unlock business growth and strategy execution whilst achieving greater alignment between their customer and employee experiences. This supports their vision of being their customers' preferred retail brand.

Solid performance is critical for business success and, together with KPIs, or hard goals, Woolworths has built its values and behaviours into its performance conversations. Leaders are measured by how well they have demonstrated values-based leadership, how they've developed their leadership competencies, and how they've been showing up to their peers and teams. In other words, it's not just what they achieve but how they achieve it.



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The values-based leadership programme

The VBL programme is designed to support employees throughout their career at Woolworths and help them master many of the essential skills they'll need to be not just team managers, but authentically values-based leaders. These skills range from personal leadership – learning to recognise and develop their own strengths and development areas, communication styles, impact, and motivators – to coaching and mentoring to nurture and grow the talent in their teams to build and strengthen leadership pipeline.

To date, almost 8,000 employees have completed various modules and will continue to build on these as new development areas are identified. Each of the six tailored components are delivered over 1 to 2 days and participation and progression through the programmes can extend over 2 to 4 years depending on the needs of the business and individual development requirements.



VBL 0: Introduction to VBL

This is a high-level introduction to the programme. As participants develop further in their careers they can transition onto the full programme for more focused development.



VBL 1: Personal Leadership

During this module participants gain the self-awareness they need to be more effective. They also explore how their personal values and the Woolworths values align and tackle any blind spots.



VBL 2: Team Leadership

Participants are equipped to lead their teams by growing awareness of the personal preferences of each team member and working in ways that build collaboration and delivery. Leaders are equipped to give feedback, and adapt and connect with each team member.



VBL 3: Coaching and Mentoring

This module is about developing the team to improve performance, coach through challenges and nurture growth. Leaders receive practical guidance and models to help with coaching conversations.



VBL 4: Diversity

In this module leaders explore the value of diversity, incorporating diversity of characteristics such as race and gender, but also diversity of preference or personality. This helps leaders create a more respectful and inclusive environment.



VBL 5: Team Effectiveness

This module is fully customised based on the challenges faced by intact teams. It contains elements of previous programmes, as well as custom coaching, to help leaders solve the team's specific challenges.



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How Insights supports the programme

Woolworths has built several Insights tools and models into their programme content that spans every module. The Insights Discovery model and language flow between topics, bringing an awareness of preference, perception, and approach into every learning experience, helping leaders reflect on the impact they're having. By laying the foundation of self-awareness for leaders through the Insights Discovery model and profile, the VBL programme lets leaders first address the core questions of: "how do I show up?", "what am I good at and where do I need to apply more effort?" and, "how can I be more responsive and adaptable to meet the needs of my team".

As leaders move into the modules that explore team leadership and coaching, they focus more on building the skill of adaptability and use the Team Effectiveness model to identify gaps and potential challenges for their teams based on the team's collective preferences. The language of colour, which makes connecting with others and understanding opposing approaches and viewpoints easier, is also integrated into the CLEAR coaching model. This way leaders will understand when to dial up or dial down certain colour energies to get the most from their coaching sessions.



Keeping a finger on the pulse of changing work practices

Although the VBL programme was already firmly established within a direct delivery format, and the principles widely recognised and upheld, the evolving world of work necessitated changes to the ways they delivered the programme.

"Within the context of the changing world of work, it was important to us that we keep a finger on the pulse of the working preferences of individuals and organisations alike. With best practices in mind, constant revisions of the programme have resulted in a virtual format that is now stronger than ever" Kyle Penning, Organisational Development Specialist at Woolworths.

With these revisions, several changes were made to evolve the programme into something even more impactful and flexible for learners; suited to the increased popularity of flexible working practices. One change which modernized the content significantly was the switch from a set learning schedule to a more self-paced learning, where learners can complete a series of shorter online modules in their own time.

"People love the virtual setting; it's more accessible and digestible and it gives people time to process and absorb the information. We are exploring a more hybrid approach now that we have that option so we can cater for more learning styles."

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- Kyle Penning, Organisational Development Specialist at Woolworths



The impacts of value-based leadership

The VBL programme helps Woolworths embed its' culture, led by individuals who are fully connected and self-aware. This helps them build a working environment that empowers and engages teams. In their annual engagement survey, the organisation has received improved feedback about team leadership since the introduction of the programme. This indicates that the values-based leadership approach is making a difference from the ground up.

Insights is a global people development company that champions self-awareness as a force for change in the workplace. We tackle your organisational challenges by improving understanding, communication, and performance for each learner.

Find out more about Insights solutions at www.insights.com

