



a fierce case study

How One Agency Pulled Off The Impossible: Strengthening Engagement During Times of Big Change

This case study shows how the Fierce Conversations workshop grew from an initial audience of 450 to an audience of over 29,000 employees and helped improve engagement as part of a larger change management strategy.

Background

The BC Public Service Agency is a centralized HR and training function for all government agencies in British Columbia. The agency is made up of approximately 450 people supporting over 29,000 in hiring, employee relations, workplace health, and training and development.

Challenges

When Lynda Tarras accepted the role of Deputy Minister for the BC Public Service Agency, she was given a mandate for change. Not only were employees shifting to a new business model to align more closely with leading corporations, they were also introducing a new Human Resources (HR) plan and a new customer service philosophy. *The overarching goals?* To position the agency as an ally for success to its internal customers and to deliver on the BC Public Service's goal to become a top employer in Canada.

As part of her change management strategy, Tarras brought in Fierce Conversations. She'd been introduced to the book by a former executive and was immediately intrigued. "I'd already been in the HR business for about 30 years when I read it," said Tarras. "And I was really drawn to how it simplified important conversations."

When Tarras learned there was a Fierce Conversations workshop, she and Lily Seto, the Coaching Strategist at BC Public Service Agency, decided to attend. "The materials were perfect for supporting our strategy—well packaged and simple. We knew people could leave the workshop the next day and make changes," said Tarras. "So we set to work on a plan."



**BRITISH
COLUMBIA**
BC Public Service

CHALLENGES

- Finding tools to effectively communicate big changes
- Connecting coaching to other initiatives
- Limited discretionary funds

SOLUTIONS

- Top-down implementation & executive sponsorship
- Shared leadership
- Community of practice

RESULTS

- Fierce Conversations is the most subscribed workshop with waitlists for every offering and 97% satisfaction rate
- Coaching conversations linked to other initiatives (including *Lean*)
- Performance conversations taking place year-round rather than once a year
- Dispute intervention is more pro-active
- Supervisory-level management assessment improved by 9 points (as measured by the organization's Work Environment Survey)

MEET LYNDA

*Deputy Minister for the
BC Public Service Agency*

Like many North American organizations, the BC Public Service Agency was affected by the economic downturn, which impacted the availability of discretionary funds.

“We decided to invest in Fierce despite limited funds because we knew it would make us more efficient as an organization,” said Tarras. “We’ve seen huge savings that can be reinvested. It supports our other programs—such as *Lean*—by providing tools for having tough conversations about difficult subjects—like cutting waste.”



“*I’d already been in the HR business for about 30 years when I read [Fierce Conversations]. And I was really drawn to how it simplified important conversations.*”

Solutions

1 TOP-DOWN IMPLEMENTATION & EXECUTIVE SPONSORSHIP

The rollout began with top-down implementation. The first step was for all supervisors—approximately 100—within the 450-person agency to attend the Fierce Conversations workshop. The training prepared supervisors to model new behaviors and lead the business transformation.

“The [learning] materials were perfect for supporting our strategy—well packaged and simple. We knew people could leave the workshop the next day and make changes.”

— LYNDA TARRAS
Deputy Minister for the BC Public Service Agency

One reason top-down implementation was so successful is Tarras's commitment to the program. As the executive sponsor, Tarras not only lives the materials herself, she also facilitates three or four sessions a year to executives. She clearly signals that Fierce is a critical part of the culture. As a result, very little marketing is required. People seek out the workshop on their own.

“People leave the [fierce training] workshops engaged and feeling empowered. More importantly, conversations are improving and taking place more regularly.”

– LILY SETO
Coaching Strategist at
BC Public Service Agency

2 SHARED LEADERSHIP

Tarras knew successfully leading change was not a job she could do alone. “We set the course,” said Tarras. “We provided the tools and set the expectations. And then we let our leaders know, ‘Now it’s your turn to lead the change. We’ll support you through the process.’”

While leaders are thrilled with the results of the workshop, they’re also focused on making sure the learning sticks so it becomes part of the new culture. “We’re always looking for ways to gather evidence of change,” said Seto. “We want to provide opportunities for people to solidify learning and retain what they’ve learned.”

3 COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

One sustainment solution has been a robust community of practice. “What’s amazing is that it was grassroots; it wasn’t mandated,” said Tarras. “People took the class and decided to create a community of practice.”

The group connects—in-person, online and over the phone—once a month to share what they’ve learned and go over what’s worked well and what hasn’t. Participants reinforce learning by working on and solving real problems. New workshop attendees are invited to join so the community is always growing.

Results

There’s no doubt Fierce Conversations is popular. “Soon after we delivered the program internally within our agency,” said Tarras. “Our customers got wind of it and asked us for access to the program.”

1 MOST SUBSCRIBED WORKSHOP

In a few short years, Fierce Conversations has organically grown from the initial audience of 450 to a program that is widely coveted across the entire organization of over 29,000. The workshop is now the most subscribed course the Learning Centre offers with

waitlists for every offering—including a 200-person waitlist in Victoria. Ninety-seven percent of attendees would recommend the course to others.

“There was an obvious need for the material,” said Seto. “People leave the workshop engaged and feeling empowered. More importantly, conversations are improving and taking place regularly.”

2 LINKED TO OTHER INITIATIVES

Fierce Conversations not only complements the overall performance engagement activities, it’s also been a useful approach to day-to-day activities. Many teams use Fierce “Beach Ball” conversations to engage teams, uncover issues, and promote positive collaboration.

In addition, the organization has adopted *Lean* tools to involve all employees in continuous improvement. “Fierce is very linked to *Lean*,” said Seto. “It provides the tools for having conversations about how to be more effective and cut waste.”

3 DAILY COACHING & FEEDBACK

“People are starting to understand that it’s critical to have coaching conversations on a daily basis,” said Tarras. “That’s what creates an environment where people come to work every day and are supported to grow and develop, and to look for ways to improve our services to the citizens of BC.”

“Performance reviews aren’t just annual conversations,” said Seto. “They’re ongoing conversations. The actual review should be a reflection of all the conversations that take place throughout the year.”

4 PRO-ACTIVE DISPUTE INTERVENTION

Even with regular check-ins, conflict is inevitable. The good news is conflict is not always negative and often leads to positive change.

With a range of conflict management services, the agency provides ministry clients with everything from training and performance coaching to HR advisory services, mediation, and investigations.


“Fierce is one of the key supports to manage conflict in the organization,” said Tarras. “Sometimes people run to dispute resolution too quickly. With Fierce we’re starting on the other end by training people to have conversations and resolve things before they become problems.”

5 IMPROVED SUPERVISORY-LEVEL MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT

One unexpected success the agency encountered during their times of change and financial cutbacks was in the area of engagement.

Every two years, the agency conducts an employee engagement survey. “We thought our scores would take a dive because of all the big changes,” said Seto. “Overall our scores remained steady. And our supervisory-level management scores actually went up by 9 points. We were absolutely amazed.”

The team conducted focus groups to get to the bottom of the results. “When we asked people what had changed,” said Tarras. “They told us people were paying attention to how they conducted conversations. They were receiving coaching on a regular basis.”



“*What’s amazing is that [the transfer of learning] was grassroots; it wasn’t mandated. People took the class and decided to create a community of practice.*

— LYNDIA TARRAS
Deputy Minister for the BC Public Service Agency

How does the BC Public Service Agency support the BC Public Service?

by ensuring the right people get the right tools at the right time

Next Steps

As the BC Public Service Agency continues its commitment to becoming a coaching culture, they plan to link coaching to all other initiatives and develop new strategies to leverage the organic growth of Fierce.

“One of the greatest values you get from broad implementation is everyone uses the same language,” said Tarras. “They reinforce the same learning and use the same terms.”

One thing is for sure: The BC Public Service is committed to being the best. And they’re well on their way. They’ve been named a top employer in Canada for the past six years.

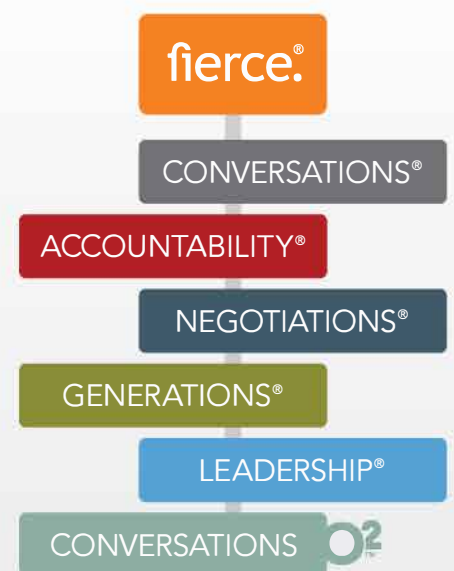
add fierce to your training toolkit

OUR DIVERSE, GLOBAL CLIENT LIST UNDERSCORES A BASIC TRUTH:

Business is fundamentally an extended conversation—with colleagues, customers and the unknown future emerging around us. Whether your focus is on implementing key initiatives, managing top talent, improving customer acquisition and retention, developing leaders, or simply igniting productive dialogue that generates clarity and impetus for change—success occurs one conversation at a time.

For more information about how Fierce can help your business, visit fierceinc.com or contact us at **206.787.1100**.

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WHILE
NO SINGLE
CONVERSATION
IS GUARANTEED
TO CHANGE THE
TRAJECTORY
OF A CAREER,
A COMPANY, A
RELATIONSHIP
OR A LIFE —

ANY SINGLE
CONVERSATION
CAN.

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