

Breakthrough Leadership Holds Second Summit

An Interview with Program Director Diane Ries

During the second week of June, Breakthrough Leadership held its second successful summit, inducting another class of 40 state team members into the ranks of program graduates. For those not familiar, Breakthrough Leadership is a program available for team members who are new to state government and have an interest in learning about leadership, state government, connections between state team members, and about themselves. The application-only program hosts a 3-day summit for participants to attend, with a summit held every quarter.

“It’s intended to lay the foundation for your leadership journey,” program director Diane Ries says. “With the State being so large, and with so many things that we offer, it can feel overwhelming to understand how everything works. This method helps to alleviate feelings of overwhelm and develop a comprehensive understanding of how legislative decisions affect our daily lives. It also fosters a collective sense of empathy towards the challenges faced by lawmakers.”

In November of 2023, Diane joined the Office of Administration’s Division of Personnel to build this program and its curriculum from the ground up. One of her goals in creating the program was to address a growing need for engagement with new state team members. “We see significant turn over in the first year and retain only 38% of team members beyond 3 years. We are also about to see a large percentage of our workforce retire in the next 5 years, leaving room for team members to step into new leadership roles,” Diane explains. “We want to retain top talent beyond 3 years, and we are hoping to set them up for success to be leaders in the future.”



Breakthrough Leadership isn’t open for just anyone who’s new to state employment. In addition to the stipulation that participants have worked for 6 months to 3 years with the state, participants must apply with essay-style questions and one letter of recommendation. “The intention of applying for the program is based on the premise that growth and learning happen when there’s intrinsic motivation, rather than being told you will attend something,” Diane says.

When asked what she’s looking for from applicants, Diane advised that she reviews applications searching for individuals who are serious about the program, who devote a lot of thought to responses, who have an evident desire for growth, and who take care to follow the directions. “If you’re not selected, don’t take it personally. Keep trying. Some departments have more competition than others. How you respond to that ‘no’ is also evident in future applications and is taken into consideration with each cycle.”

The 3-day summit consists of a DISC – Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness – behavioral assessment, networking opportunities and coaching, interactive legislative education, and



by Kayleigh Little

education about leadership. Diane hopes that graduates continue the journey of learning on their own. “I envision that they will continue investing in themselves because leadership growth is a personal journey. The only expectation that one should hold for their own development lies within themselves. Hopefully, this kickstarts that journey.”

Diane holds the program itself to the same standard of growth as she holds participants. Since the inaugural summit in March 2024, Diane has made several changes to the curriculum. “I created more table discussions to engage the personality types that feel better in a smaller group rather than speaking in a larger group. It allows for deeper conversation. A couple of concepts were pulled to give a deeper focus on concepts that have more impact. Instead, we invested more time in their DISC report, and practice giving and receiving feedback. A lot of the changes occurred because of feedback provided by the inaugural group and my own reflection on what worked and what didn’t.”

She has ideas for the future of the program, including even more connection with the legislature. “One big aspiration that I have is to build knowledge within our workers and legislators so they have a broader understanding of how the work they do impacts state agencies and our ability to execute the things that they’re trying to improve. If we can bridge the gap between elected officials and state workers, it can only improve how we all work together,” Diane says.

Diane is also exploring the idea of a second level of the program that would be open to people who have worked with the state beyond 3 years and are searching for leadership development opportunities.

While she is always looking forward to the growth and evolution of the program, Diane also reflected on her involvement in the program. “It is very much my baby. I designed the logo and branding, I built the curriculum, and I read every application to the program,” she explains. “I was hired in November, and the program launched in March, without any



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major failures or setbacks. I am very proud of this accomplishment and couldn't have done it without the support of the Talent Development team." She was awarded a Challenge Coin for her outstanding success with the program, presented by Deputy Commissioner, Caroline Coulter and Interim Director of Personnel, Paul Buckley on April 11, 2024.

Diane's hard work in creating the program has resulted in great positive impact on participants and their connection to their work. "The energy from participants of the program has been overwhelmingly positive and people feel more

connected to the work they're doing," Diane explains. "It's still really early to tell what long-term impacts we may see. I will say that we had a participant express that they feel reinvigorated to re-dedicate themselves to the mission of their job. Hearing this was extremely rewarding and lets me know the program is having an impact on retention."

Diane looks forward to continued success with the Breakthrough Leadership program. Applications will be accepted again starting July 22 for the next summit that will take place September 9 – 11. If you're interested in laying the foundation for your leadership journey, mark the date on your calendar to submit your application on the Breakthrough Leadership website [here](#).

Take a moment to visit the frequently asked questions page for more information on the program, or e-mail talentdevelopment@oa.mo.gov.

