

Developing leaders at Saracens Academy

The Foundation for Leadership through Sport (Vic Luck) has supported Saracens by designing and directing a five month programme to accelerate the development of leadership capabilities in the Academy. The players and their coaches were joined on the programme by executives from Saracens business partner, Sanlam Private Wealth, a leading wealth management company.

Don Barrell, Saracens Academy Manager noted that: *'The course was a real success. We shall keep working with the players to build on what they accomplished and learned from the discussions and challenges in the workshops'.*

The core of the programme was to enhance the self-awareness of participants regarding the impact they have on others, enabling them to develop a focused personal development programme, which they put into practice in their workplaces, obtaining regular feedback from coaches and colleagues on their progress. In essence, this replicates the **GROW** cycle of personal improvement which applies as much to leader skills as to other sporting and business skills: set **GOALS**; understand the **REALITY** of the current performance; look at **OPTIONS** for improvement (where to focus and how to improve); determine **WHAT ACTION** to take (practising to improve)...and go round the circle again!

The underpinning philosophy is that the best way to develop leadership is to practise in increasingly challenging workplace situations; the oft-quoted '10,000 hours' maxim to achieve mastery of any skill applies just as much to leadership as other sports skills. It's about 'doing' not studying.

The programme entailed attendance at four workshops and undertaking individual assignments in between. Two of the workshops were held at Saracens' ground, one at Sanlam's offices and the fourth at Sandhurst Military Academy. Subjects covered included: an overview of leadership and what makes a good leader; obtaining feedback on performance and writing a plan to improve; developing awareness of self and others; communicating effectively; decision-making under pressure; leading teams to high performance; the military approach to leadership and development

Alison Barwell, HR Director at Sanlam Private Wealth commented: *'These workshops were a unique and innovative way to bring future leaders together for training and development. They offered squad players and our colleagues the chance to learn from each other and give and receive feedback. Everyone has a Personal Learning Development Plan and is encouraged to follow this as part of their ongoing development'*

Whilst participants demonstrably developed their leadership over the programme, the key to their future success as leaders will be to continue to GROW over the coming years, hungrily and gratefully receiving feedback from coaches and others, and targeting ever higher levels of performance in this key area, which should make all the difference to their careers in rugby and beyond