



Forecast for Change

Senior executives at AccuWeather form a stronger leadership team after taking part in Penn State Executive Programs.

Nearly one month after AccuWeather Inc.'s executive retreat, Evan Myers can still feel the enthusiasm and passion among his company's senior executives. He's even noticed changes in how they communicate and work with each other to accomplish common goals.

Like most retreats, this one focused on strategic direction but with a twist. In addition to developing strategic goals, the company's top 15 leaders spent time examining their own perceptions, skills and management style, then identified what changes they had to make so that everyone would speak the same language and work in a common direction.

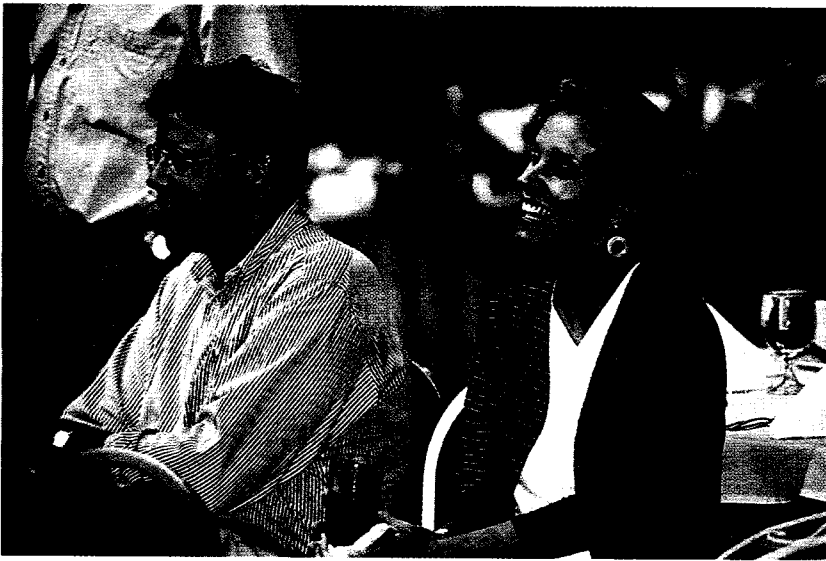
As senior vice president and COO of AccuWeather, a global commercial weather service based in State College, Pa., Myers firmly believed that with just a gentle push, the leaders in his organization could enhance their performance, function better as a team and raise company operations to a higher level.

His starting point was Penn State Executive Programs, a part of the Smeal College of Business at Pennsylvania State University in University Park, Pa. Myers had previously participated in several of the organization's programs and was also familiar with its national reputation of customizing innovative business programs.

That was especially important since the management experience of the company's leaders varied greatly. "We have such a diverse background of people," he says. "We needed everybody to start out in the same place and share information and organizational theory in order to develop a more effective leadership team."

Roughly one month before the June

2003 retreat, Penn State Executive Programs requested that the company's leaders and direct reports complete a brief, online survey that gathered data on the perceptions of AccuWeather leaders with regards to 18 critical dimensions of organizational effectiveness. The data were analyzed and a summary profile was created to provide a foundation for both



With the help of Penn State's Executive Program, AccuWeather leaders form a stronger team.

program design and group discussions.

Survey designer and Penn State Executive Program Professor Al Vicere notes, "Their responses began to paint a picture of the organization in terms of its strategy, its approach to leadership and the nature of its operating culture. We also were able to identify gaps between perspectives shared by the senior leadership team and management. Those gaps became the focus for action-planning efforts throughout the program."

Still, there was a lot more ground to cover. On the first day of the retreat, two facilitators from Penn State Executive Programs engaged participants in examining different management theories, the historical challenges of various organizations, AccuWeather's management

structure and how each leader fits into that structure, challenges the company faced, its core abilities and how companies become stagnant.

"We had very good, lively discussions," Myers recalls. "They didn't just present the material and leave it up to our own devices to figure out. They actively engaged us and made sure by challenging us as a group, that we not only understood what they were talking about, but knew how the information could be specifically applied to our company."

The survey results were revealed the following day. The facilitators shared the responses, those that were similar as well as those where disconnects occurred, then compared the data to that of other organizations. By identifying gaps, it enabled AccuWeather's leaders to explore creative ways to bring everyone into alignment.

On the last day, everyone used the information they received over the previous two days to develop action plans for the company's strategic approach. At the

same time, Myers says, they were also challenged to look deep into their own leadership abilities, style, and perceptions and how they relate to one another.

So far, some leaders have recognized their need to better communicate with peers by providing them with more information about projects and other company activities. Others have made it known that they want to be challenged by other leaders if they fail to improve upon existing skills.

"This is the first time we've done something like this with top leadership," Myers says. "Cultural change isn't achieved in a week or month. But this already has had a significant impact. Some of the changes I was hoping for are already happening."