



Novartis achieves a 43% decrease in voluntary staff turnover with TripleGoal's Vertical Growth Program

With 700 employees across the country, Novartis had the courage to face the fact that they needed help with engagement and leadership. They decided to invest in their leaders and enable them to undertake TripleGoal's Vertical Growth program. They have achieved remarkable results, far exceeding their expectations.

THEIR CHALLENGE

Across the pharmaceutical industry, the average staff turnover rate sits at around 15%. Before the Vertical Growth program was undertaken the turnover for Novartis' Australian division was well above average, running as high as 22%.

The costs to the company were considerable, with the HR department rating the cost of each person who left at twice the value of their annual salary. This figure, although alarming in itself, did not fully take into account the inevitable impact on the morale, team continuity and productivity of departments and divisions that were losing important members. Clearly, action needed to be taken.

As the Novartis Country Head put it: "We are bleeding."

Adding to the urgent need to change was a global directive from the worldwide headquarters that required all the divisions to change their organisational structures to address the new more competitive landscape and realise the full potential of the product pipeline. Pressure was building and decisive action was required.

At the time, Novartis ran a global survey of its employees where results showed that there were multiple issues around engagement at senior leadership and management levels. This gave some insights into where the challenges were and what might be done to overcome them. A new HR Director was also appointed with a specific mandate to change the company culture.

In collaboration with Senior Leaders, middle managers and employees, a deeper analysis of the issues was carried out. The survey scores revealed what was not working well. The problem was real, expensive and needed urgent attention.

Some key areas were:

- Retain top talent
- Improve senior leadership capability
- Build people-management capability
- Reduce the complexity of the decision-making processes
- Improve the IT platform and data access

The first three fell within the remit of HR and this was where the Vertical Growth program came into play as a practical solution for sustainable cultural change.

THE SOLUTION

The implementation of TripleGoal's Vertical Growth Program, a rigorous, research-based development journey designed to measurably elevate leadership impact across executive teams and throughout the organisation.

Vertical growth is not about adding more skills to an already full toolkit. It is about upgrading the internal operating system of leadership.

After decades of research and real-world application, one truth is clear: Leadership effectiveness is not defined by personality, but rather by behaviour.

More specifically, it is defined by the leader's ability to:

- **Strengthen Green Zone behaviours** (intentional, values-aligned leadership)
- **Reduce Red Zone behaviours** (reactive, fear-driven patterns)
- **Build the self-regulatory capacity** to choose wisely under pressure

The Vertical Growth Program develops leaders across the seven Green Zone practices, while systematically measuring and addressing Red Zone derailleurs.

THE SEVEN GREEN ZONE PRACTICES

1. Self-Regulation

Self-regulation enables leaders to manage their attention, emotional reactivity and energy, remaining balanced and intentional under pressure.

2. Drive Accountability

Leaders take full ownership of their behaviour and results, while holding others to high standards of performance and respect. Accountability becomes learning-oriented rather than blame-driven.

3. Lead from Values

Leaders clarify what they stand for and consistently align their decisions and behaviour with those values. This creates credibility and trust.

4. Inspire a Vision

Leaders articulate a compelling future and connect strategy to meaningful purpose, helping others see how their work contributes to something larger.

5. Cultivate Curiosity

Leaders foster learning, experimentation and challenge. They create space for dissent and reflection. This enables greater learning and faster innovation.

6. Empower Others to Shine

Leaders develop people, share responsibility and create conditions for others to grow, perform and take ownership.

7. Engage the Heart

Leaders build human connection by expressing appreciation, reinforcing values and strengthening team cohesion.

Novartis initially enrolled its top talent cohort in the Vertical Growth Program. This group represented both the organisation's highest-potential leaders and those most at risk of leaving if meaningful development did not occur. Root cause analysis had revealed that accelerated growth, challenge and genuine development were the primary drivers for this cohort. The retention strategy therefore needed to go well beyond conventional training.

An off-the-shelf leadership course would not have been sufficient. These high achievers required a rigorous, long-term transformational experience that would stretch them personally, elevate their leadership maturity and provide practical application within the business.

The Vertical Growth Program was selected because it addressed leadership at the behavioural and mindset level, not merely at the skill level.

The impact was immediate and significant. Feedback from the top talent group was overwhelmingly positive. Participants reported increased clarity, measurable behavioural shifts and stronger alignment with the organisation's values and strategic direction.

Observing this shift, the Novartis Executive Team made a pivotal decision to undertake the program themselves.

The CEO and HR Director recognised that to truly support and retain their highest achievers, they needed to speak the same language, understand the same frameworks and model the same standards.

More importantly, they confronted a difficult truth. Many of the undesirable behaviours within the organisation were being driven, directly or indirectly, by senior leadership patterns. They understood that organisational transformation could not occur without personal transformation at the most senior level.

This marked the turning point. Once the Executive Team fully committed to the Vertical Growth journey, the work became embedded in the fabric of the organisation. Behavioural standards shifted. Role modelling strengthened. Cultural language aligned.

From that point forward, the program cascaded more broadly, equipping additional leadership cohorts and accelerating sustainable transformation across the business.

THE INTERNAL STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT

The commitment of the Executive Team and, in particular, of the HR Director was outstanding. Progress had to be measured and tested frequently, but in a way that was unobtrusive. As the HR Director put it, "These are lead indicators, not lag indicators. You need the results for HR to prove you are making a difference and create accountability."

Leadership Growth Profile 360 assessments were utilised to support the program. When any resistance to the necessary changes being taught came up, the HR Director was able to maintain momentum: **"We had tons of reports, monitoring, feedback and results. We are in business and we want results!"** she said.

Any truly transformational leadership program is challenging. It is designed to help leaders change their long-held habits and beliefs. It is not a tick-the-box exercise, and it is not about tools and techniques: it is about personal growth, mindset changes and habit changes.

There were several pivotal moments where it was literally put to a team vote to continue or to stop the program.

This strategy proved very powerful as it ensured the program and process were given a constant buy in and buy out option. Ultimately, this helped the Executive Team to engage with the program more and it also supported TripleGoal with real time feedback for improvement.

THE ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Staff turnover dropped from 22% to 12% – significantly below industry norms.**
- **Overall engagement lifted significantly from 78% to 85%.**
- **Novartis went from "bleeding high potentials" to not losing a single high potential from the beginning of the program up to the time of writing of this case study**
- **Most of the high potential course participants have achieved more senior roles within the business since**
- **The executive team is now a model of a high functioning leadership team. Honesty is at an all time high, effectiveness and cohesiveness are exceptional. The team trusts each other and leads the organisation based on its core values.**

All of this progress was achieved even though survey ratings for salary and benefits did not increase. The process appealed to deeper values and was effective because of it.

Another very important change was that all Senior Leaders re-prioritised their business objectives, making engagement a top objective of their leadership efforts. For a corporation with such a strong historical emphasis on commercial results to reframe their understanding of how to achieve those results was a remarkable achievement for everyone involved.

Companies are made up of the people in them. In the War Room in the Ford Motor Company's HQ is a sign that says: "Culture eats strategy for breakfast."

As TripleGoal founder Michael Bunting puts it, "We have a way to teach very deep and meaningful material in the logical language of an engineer and still not lose the human element. The process stands up to the greatest cynic because it is logical. This is key to buy in for transformational work."