

# Building Collaboration within a Transactional Industry

## Challenge

Formed as a joint venture between Berkshire Hathaway and Leucadia National Corporation, Berkadia is a leader in the commercial real estate industry. Using innovative, technology-driven data collection and analytics, Berkadia provides a range of services, including investment sales, mortgage banking, and loan servicing. Berkadia offers their customers' crucial insight gathered from decades' worth of proprietary data, including over 250 market and sub-market metrics, debt information from 300,000+ properties and over 9,000 demographic data points. Berkadia's leadership knew that, as a fast-growing company with an international team spread across the United States and India, they needed to proactively construct a robust culture of teamwork using collaboration strategies that could effectively respond to a changing industry.

The task would be especially challenging as collaboration in transactional industries can often be an oversight. In addition to navigating intercultural differences, Berkadia faced the challenges of a rapidly evolving economic and technological landscape, as well as the predictable internal frictions occasioned by accelerated growth.

One of the company's core values is that "people matter," reflecting the belief that authentic relationships and collaboration in business with both external customers and internal colleagues are of paramount importance. CEO Justin Wheeler put it succinctly, "Our company is 100% people." Yet, maintaining this focus can be difficult, especially in an industry that President and CFO Randy Jensen describes as

“very transactional.” Jensen continued to describe the tendency within the commercial real estate industry to evaluate people based on “cold, hard facts and numbers” rather than a more holistic view. It’s clear that Berkadia needed to turn to the best employee collaboration examples and apply the best practices and principles to their organization.

Because of Arbinger’s expertise in collaboration in business and cultivating an others-focused, outward mindset, Berkadia enlisted Arbinger to help craft and implement the cultural framework and enterprise collaboration tools essential for continued success.

## **Solution**

Arbinger consultants first met with Berkadia’s senior leadership team to provide training on improving team collaboration, business communication strategies, and organizational mindset change. In order for a widespread cultural transformation to take root and thrive, those with the most influence within the organization needs to be truly Invested. Berkadia leadership recognized the Arbinger framework and enterprise collaboration tools are pivotal for cultivating more productive conflict resolution and nourishing a culture of self-accountability.

They also recognized that they could only expect the same sort of responsiveness from the rest of the company that they were willing to invest in themselves. The the leadership team decided to become trained as facilitators themselves, rather than delegating that responsibility. Because maintaining an outward mindset is an ongoing practice rather than an event, it requires bravery to let others in your organization witness the authentic struggle to continually see others as people instead of as obstacles or means to your ends.

Cultivating healthy collaboration in business is no small feat. Randy described grappling with “the gap between where my

aspirations were and where I was” as he prepared to facilitate. He and the other company leaders soon came to value the opportunity this invitation provided, as it allowed him and the other 1800 employees at Berkadia an opportunity to use enterprise collaboration tools to create “a work environment that has less politics, less drama, and is more authentic—where it’s ok to make a mistake and talk about it, and it’s ok to admit when you’re wrong.” In addition to witnessing the immediate and tangible ways this work accelerated their business results, Berkadia’s leadership was also deeply gratified to see how their positive work culture and collaboration in business powerfully influenced employees for the better in their home and personal lives. Arbinger’s powerful collaboration strategies became standard procedure at Berkadia.

In addition to equipping the leadership team with mindset training, facilitation skills, and communication strategies in business, Arbinger helped Berkadia to adapt the principles and framework into a culture-building initiative called The Berkadia Way which included leader-specific tools. The initiative provided the structure for spreading an outward mindset approach throughout the company—an approach that could be usefully adapted regardless of the specific type of work engaged in by each employee. As these efforts spread throughout the company so did positive results.

## **Results**

By working with Arbinger, Berkadia has successfully created a cultural infrastructure that unlocks data-driven collaboration and reinforces best business practices. Hilary Provinse, executive vice president and head of mortgage banking describes how the framework provided by Arbinger increased the volume of employee collaboration examples she sees at Berkadia. Provinse noted that these communication strategies in business “really encouraged collaboration across regions,

across divisions within Berkadia, and the breaking down of silos even in our highly competitive sales environment.” She also observed that the deepened relationships between colleagues translated into a greater willingness to entrust peers with valued client relationships, thus improving team collaboration.

Working with Arbinger has also increased role clarity and self accountability as employees consider the impact of their efforts on the objectives, needs, and obstacles of coworkers and clients. These changes have been paired with business communication strategies to enable an environment that is simultaneously competitive, high-performing, and collaborative. The collaboration strategies introduced by Arbinger have also helped to resolve longstanding conflicts between different departments in Berkadia. One example took place between the mortgage banking division and finance.

In order to finalize loan approvals and maintain business momentum, the mortgage banking employees require a confirmation from the finance team that customer payments have been received and processed. As a customer-facing unit, the mortgage banking team often felt pressure to move quickly and experienced frustration at what appeared to be unconcerned, painfully slow responses.

On the other end, the finance team had responsibility for accurately tracking billions of dollars of transactions, with important safeguards to prevent costly mistakes. For years, both parties had felt mutual exasperation. Collaboration in transactional industries can be incredibly difficult. Thanks to Arbinger’s help, now with an outward mindset lens, the teams were able to account for their impact and uncover ways to offer support and they transformed their relationship.

When reflecting on the impact of Arbinger and the Berkadia Way, CEO Justin Wheeler said, “It is much more than just a toolset that is there to deal with problems. We didn’t see any

other way to prepare our people to embrace and ultimately drive change that would be more impactful than Arbinger.”