Communication tools aid Cooper's expansion

When Cooper Tire & Rubber Company expanded its automotive supply operation through the acquisition of existing companies, top management recognized the need for additional systematic communication tools. The benefits of a common informed culture and focused philosophies and beliefs were considered key elements in the company's success.

One of the larger obstacles to achieving the desired outcome was the disconnect between plant management and hourly workers regarding financial decisions. These decisions seemed to be treated like "state secrets" and at times created strained labor relations. "Many of the plant workers and even some of the management staff didn't understand how or why some of the financial decisions were made and what the key financial measurables of the 'new Cooper' were," recalls Larry Phillips, plant manager of the recently acquired Mitchell Ontario facility.

So when Mr. Phillips was invited to participate in a new training session to improve communication and build relations, he was pleasantly surprised to find himself engaged in a unique program that encouraged involvement and two-way interaction with all participants. "It wasn't the all too common dry lecture-based presentation you normally expect" explains Mr. Phillips.

Instead, Cooper worked with Celemi to help the 400 plus hourly and salaried employees at the plant understand internal financial decisions, goals and objectives, and rally their support. Celemi created a three-phase solution that began by gathering employees together in small teams to learn about Cooper's culture and its implications on reaching strategic goals.

Working over a poster-sized playing board, or WorkMat™, employees linked future success indicators to current strategic initiatives—a process that helped everyone internalize Cooper's "Philosophy & Beliefs" statements and translate them into action items.

CELEMI
THE POWER OF LEARNING

Celemi's Apples & Oranges™, a simulation about cash flow and basic business finance, was the focus of the second phase. In this session, employees got a chance to "keep the books" by recording production and inventory levels, revenue, expenses, profits and more during a business game that mirrored Cooper's production and financial picture.

"The participants learned how money moves within our company, where it is spent and where it is tied up" explains Mr. Phillips. "The exercise is very useful in showing everyone how their day-to-day activities impact the company and why management puts so much emphasis on inventory reduction and scrap elimination".

A third simulation helps employees take their new discoveries and link them to ongoing programs within the company. Employees saw the flow of resources in the company including cash and assets; they also experienced where money is tied up on things such as salaries and depreciation. "People saw how their actions can make an impact on a daily basis," says Mr. Phillips.

The results of this one-day learning program exceeded the company's expectations. "Through the sharing of information, everyone understands the reasons behind financial decisions. The employees now see themselves as important pieces of the puzzle and how they fit in. The disconnect between the workers and their supervisors is diminished which equates to improved morale and labor relations."

The company also cites improved communication between hourly and salaried employees, and a shared understanding of financial terms and strategic goals that make general meetings more productive. In addition, the employee suggestion program holds more relevance to those who have attended the course.

"People stop to tell me how much they enjoyed the program, and others that have yet to go through it express their desire to do so," adds Mr. Phillips.

The program proved so successful, Cooper intends to make it available to its population of over 20,000 people worldwide. "It provides a consistent message and minimizes time off the shop floor," concludes Mr. Phillips. "The amount of easily understood information is conveyed so effectively and in about half the time of traditional training and creates real value."

CELEMI
THE POWER OF LEARNING

www.celemi.com

CHANGEABILITY®
Leading People Through Business & Technology Transitions

Kim Godley
kimgodley@changeabilitygroup.com
202-686-6072
www.changeabilitygroup.com

Copyright © 2001 by Celemiab International AB. All rights reserved.