

Getting teams working in the oil patch

In Alberta's energy sector a dysfunctional team can have disastrous consequences. Safety and efficiency are paramount: A mistake not only costs money—it can cost someone his or her life.

Living in a remote area where you can't pick your co-workers or your roommate can create a toxic environment. With downtime costing the company thousands of dollars a day, and no opportunity to replace staff, a team that is not working well together must be fixed.

"I recently worked with a team of 18 people tasked with restoring a production plant that had been offline for about 18 months," says Graham Dobson, whose consulting company GRAMARG Communications specializes in helping dysfunctional teams get back on track.

"The restoration was scheduled to take about six months but was behind schedule. Half of the team had worked together previously; the other half was new to the company. Over the two months prior to GRAMARG's engagement there had been a 25% turnover."

Dobson was called in to find the root causes of the productivity issue and recommend and implement solutions.

Business Challenges

- Low team productivity
- High staff turnover
- Conflict between new employees and managers

Company Profile

GRAMARG Communications Inc. is an Alberta-based firm offering consulting services, workshops, and managerial services. Established in 1988 by owner and manager Graham Dobson, it helps businesses to improve the way they work by focusing on employees and employee engagement.

GRAMARG Communications Inc.

Solution

“During initial interviews we found that there were huge differences within the team about how the restoration should be done,” he says.

“Continuing power struggles between the new employees and the long-term managers became apparent, as did the [lack of] sharing of information within the team. The client was looking for a quick resolution to the problem, so we decided to use the Parker Team Building Program and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) assessment in combination. Step one was to have everyone complete the Parker Team Development Survey, which gave us a clear picture of the characteristics needing the most attention.”

Resolving by recognizing

Once on site, GRAMARG used the MBTI assessment, walking the team members through a “living type table.”

“At each step we asked participants to acknowledge where they were located and look across the table and discuss something positive about their teammates that could identify that person with the type description. To ease the tension in the room, we made the MBTI assessment portion a lot of fun and filled the exercise with laughter.”

Dobson says the living type table helped the team “discover and discuss each other’s needs based on personality preferences. We found that by discussing differences in personality, we were able to address the communication and information issues that had plagued the team from the start.”

From recognition to respect

The team members were starting to understand each other, but there was one difficulty yet to overcome: how they treated each other.

“There was a general dissatisfaction with the level of respect being demonstrated by the newer leaders,” says Dobson. “We turned back to the Parker Team Development Survey the next day and used the

Solution

- Introduce MBTI assessment
- Focus on communication
- Focus on personality difference

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results to guide the team through setting goals and expectations about dignity and respect, communications, meeting preparedness, and others.”

Five weeks later, Dobson made a follow-up visit to check in on compliance with group norms and expectations, and to administer the Parker Team Player Survey. This helped to reinforce the contributions each member made to the team and provided additional feedback on the team’s performance.

Results

The benefits of balance

Team members commented on the value of understanding and respecting their differences. “They came away with knowledge of how to achieve balance within the team,” says Dobson, “so that several aspects of a decision would be considered before action was taken. When the team realized that it was weighted heavily on Sensing and Thinking, input was sought from those whose preferences were Intuition and Feeling. Achieving this balance made for a more inclusive environment for everyone.”

The first two-day session yielded an immediate improvement in morale, and in the amount and quality of information that became available to the whole team.

“The overall positive impact on productivity was evident to our client within the first week,” notes Dobson. “After six weeks the team was on target to meet the expected completion date. The power struggles and infighting were history, and the team was working as a unit, using the diversity of each other’s strengths to focus on the goal of their customer.”

Results

- Better, more balanced decision-making as a result of type awareness
- Increased productivity through improved team morale and a focus on strengths



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