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Editor's Message

How to Empower Your Team

by Barry Dixon

Everyone benefits when employees feel like part of a team.

Empowering your team is a concept that we often hear, but turning that concept into reality at your company can be a bit of a mystery. Think about it...come up with an idea, share it with your team and *voilà*—your staff takes the ball and runs with it—goal accomplished! Easier said than done, right? Seriously though, with indications that the market will begin to rebound later this year, now is the time to prepare your employees and get your operation in top form so your company is ready for the increase in sales and production. What better way to accomplish these objectives than by empowering your team and seeing the benefits in your bottom line and the more intangible bonuses like staff loyalty. Here are a few ways that True House has tried to empower employees by taking a look at: (a) company structure, (b) our hiring/training approach, (c) our incentive/benefit plans, and (d) our QC/safety program implementation.

In today's workforce, "empowering" employees by simply granting them authority is often not enough to motivate them to implement company goals and initiatives. In my experience, the best way to empower team members isn't to grant authority but to create a workplace that allows employees to empower themselves! The first step to successfully empowering your team is to develop the framework to communicate to everyone. In our company, we have a senior management team that consists of our COO, VP of Engineering, VP of Sales/Marketing, Director of Purchasing, VP of Manufacturing, President of Turnkey Operations, and Customer Service Manager. This team receives goals and objectives in their rawest form from our company's Executive Committee and Board of Directors. The senior management team then streamlines these goals, and effectively delegates them to team members throughout the company. The management team drives these goals because they are the ones who best know the abilities of employees in their department or area. This structure and workflow ensures that expertise is applied in all the right areas and that accountability is enforced and support is available.

Forming the senior management team and its method for delegation was one of the most significant developments we made in order to successfully implement our initiatives. Giving this team broad goals and empowering them to refine the plan created instant buy-in at the highest level of management. Furthermore, members of the management team empower each other by providing peer-level feedback as they implement our plan with their teams.

at a glance

- ☐ Empower your team by establishing good communication.
- ☐ Consider forming a senior management team to set goals, implement initiatives and delegate tasks.
- ☐ Establishing a safety committee is a great way to begin the path toward empowering a team.
- ☐ Retain good employees by offering benefits, especially health insurance.

When it comes to hiring and training production employees, our company leaves these tasks totally up to the VP of Manufacturing's management team. The company shares its financial and overall performance goals with this team and gives it the directive to find the solution and make these goals a reality. With the ability to set their staff and assess where more training is needed, the VP of Manufacturing's management team can implement and share these goals on the production level with their staff. Everyone knows the important part they play in meeting the company's goals, and we post all of our production numbers so everyone can see our progress. This buy-in from employees creates loyalty that flows in both directions, not to mention some healthy competition from line to line, shift to shift and plant to plant. The manufacturing team develops a plan that is consistent with company

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objectives while paying close attention to productivity output as well as financial expectations. The beauty of this approach is that staff is empowered and given the independence they need to get their jobs done.

Our safety committee is probably one of the most important groups in our organization. Consisting of staff from the saw department to the delivery department, the committee brings together the people who have first-hand, day-to-day knowledge of our equipment. With the support of the entire organization, this committee takes ownership of the equipment and operating it with all the proper safeguards in place. Since this committee is made up of operators, we become aware of problems more quickly and therefore have safer equipment with less down time for malfunctions and repairs. Our employees can work safely with better maintained equipment, which will in turn produce higher quality products more profitably. I recommend forming a safety team that crosses all functional areas to any manufacturer as a great way to begin the path toward empowering a team.

We at True House believe the best hiring practice is to retain employees and an ideal way to do that is to invest in their growth by supplying ongoing training and education. From Truss Technician Training for designers to ORisk for sales staff and employees dealing with contract review, WTCA offers many programs that can foster growth for your staff. No matter what programs you use, keep in mind that your management team can be an important vehicle to carry these programs out and ensure that employees get the full benefits of training.

Another key to keeping employees is offering good benefits, especially health insurance. Ever-increasing insurance costs have been a major thorn in our side. Our company's employee demographic (largely made up of young males, 18-25 years old) and level of participation (relatively low and predominately employees with families) resulted in high insurance costs that increased at an unpredictable rate from year to year. Like many manufacturers, we found it can be an uphill struggle to provide an affordable health care plan for employees while meeting the company's ROI goals. Our COO, with the help of our accounting group, worked with our insurance agents to revise our health insurance plan. Together, this group created a plan that could cover all of our employees. Especially noteworthy is that our new plan offers an option (low monthly fee with a high deductible) attractive to our younger male employees, a demographic that traditionally hasn't participated in our health insurance program. The new plan increased participation and stabilized our participation rate, which lowered monthly insurance premiums for employees and helped lock in rates in the future, ending the cycle of steep rate hikes. This rate stabilization gave our executive team a consistent number to use when forecasting financial plans because we can now bank on not having to revisit rates every year. With that initial hurdle surmounted, the team can now focus on creating other benefit programs—including disability, life insurance and a 401(k)—that will benefit our entire group.

Along with benefits, a surefire way to empower and retain employees is to provide a work environment that allows them to perform their

STRUCTURAL BUILDING ComponentsTM

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The mission of *Structural Building Components Magazine (SBC)* is to increase the knowledge of and to promote the common interests of those engaged in manufacturing and distributing structural building components. Further, *SBC* strives to ensure growth, continuity and increased professionalism in our industry, and to be the information conduit by staying abreast of leading-edge issues. *SBC's* editorial focus is geared toward the entire structural building component industry, which includes the membership of WTCA – Representing the Structural Building Components Industry. The opinions expressed in *SBC* are those of the authors and those quoted, and are not necessarily the opinions of Truss Publications or WTCA.

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very best on the job. In my book, safety and quality go hand in hand when talking about a good workplace. Likewise, producing a quality product in a safe work environment can provide countless benefits in terms of employee job satisfaction, not to mention your bottom line. We all know the key to providing a safe environment while delivering a quality product is consistency. The **WTCA In-Plant QC** program gives component manufacturers the tools they need to consistently manufacture their products to the highest standards. True House uses the program and is on target to earn certification later this year, which will also fulfill our requirements to be SCORE Achiever (Level I) certified (turn to page 31 to learn more about SCORE). **WTCA In-Plant QC** educates employees on proper manufacturing procedures and allows manufacturers to show customers, the engineering community and underwriters that their plant has a documented, third-party inspected daily QC program in place and the data to stand behind their work.

When you empower your team, or better yet when they empower themselves, the results can amaze you, not to mention make your job much easier. Like I said ... come up with an idea, share it with your team and *voilà*—goal accomplished! **SBC**

SBC Magazine encourages the participation of its readers in developing content for future issues. Do you have an article idea for a future issue or a topic that you would like to see covered? Email your thoughts and ideas to editor@sbcmag.info.



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