

# DIVERSITY INCLUSION PROGRAM:



Penn Emblem  
Companies

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## Penn Emblem Companies

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### INTRODUCTION – ADDING INCLUSION TO HR MANAGEMENT

Penn Emblem (PE) is a full-service branded decoration and promotional product company. They are America's largest emblem supplier and the premier full-service brand decorator for the rental uniform and promotional product industry. They begin with a customer's initial design concepts and handle the entire process seamlessly to the final custom-decorated products.

### BACKGROUND

Corporate companies are embracing the shift towards inclusion as more research supports the organizational success of diversity. Culture in the manufacturing industry remains traditional and has been slower to adopt the change towards diversity. PENN EMBLEM is making headway as an industry leader in inclusion-driven culture shifts and updated hiring methods. PENN EMBLEM is women-owned and enjoys a management team that reflects this diversity with an executive management team that is nearly all women, almost unheard of in the manufacturing sector. To make PENN EMBLEM future-proof, the President made a passionate and steady call for increased diversity and inclusion throughout the organization. And so, their journey began.

### SITUATION

PENN EMBLEM is a medium-sized, light manufacturing company experiencing high turnover. Like the rest of the manufacturing sector, they were finding it hard to attract qualified applicants, which turned to temporary workers that brought a high price tag. PENN EMBLEM focused on updating its hiring, interviewing, and onboarding processes to attract candidates from a diverse applicant pool. PENN EMBLEM intentionally concentrated on increasing the representation of disabled and neurodivergent employees in the workforce. This case study will reflect the efforts of the Human Resources Manager and their quest to increase retention through inclusive hiring.

## CHALLENGE

In manufacturing, if one of your competitors can produce the same product for even \$.01 less, you risk losing customers. Manufacturing is a tight industry facing complex challenges from technological advancement, hiring shortages, high turnover, and breaks in the supply chain due to COVID-19. In May 2021, Deloitte Manufacturing Institute (MI) reported nearly 500,000 openings for employment in the U.S. manufacturing sector and expected that number to rise to 2.1 million by 2030 (Deichler, 2021).

Manufacturing was experiencing a talent shortage before COVID-19, and regardless of thousands being out of work, the postings remain open. The Deloitte MI research also highlighted that this is "a near record-pace of job openings for this sector" that could result in up to a 1 trillion dollar hit to the U.S. economy (Deichler, 2021). To keep up with business demand, owners, business leaders, and recruiters in the manufacturing industry are turning to new ways to attract talent and onboard talent, one of which is increasing diversity and inclusion.

## ACTION

At the start, it may seem overwhelming to expand inclusive hiring in an organization. Adding inclusion to a Human Resources department requires planning and organizational change. PENN EMBLEM's HR Manager was tasked to think differently about hiring and recruiting to support retention. A few steps were added to the hiring process before the interview that included a phone or virtual meeting that had a conversation about interests, goals, skills, and abilities. The interviewee was invited to PENN EMBLEM to tour the location and try out different jobs to discover the best job-match-fit for the candidate.

PENN EMBLEM went from interviews with skill-based assessments (e.g., typing test, lifting test, and threading a needle) to work-based interviews. Work-based interviews went steps beyond skill assessments and were organized to include actual job tasks of the role. Following the work-based interview, candidates talked with HR about what they liked and disliked about the role(s) for which they interviewed.

Throughout the entire tour and interview process, all engaged to ensure the candidate felt comfortable and that PENN EMBLEM is a safe and supportive place of employment. After the candidate left, the HR Department determined which open position matched best with the candidate's availability, skills, work interests, and abilities.

## RESULTS

PENN EMBLEM's Human Resources Department started the inclusion journey with apprehension and a bit of fear related to how it would all work out. The HR Manager's understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) expanded to include disabilities by adding inclusion. The perspective shift to include disability as a form of diversity also opened the Manager's eyes to the reality of concealable disabilities. The success of the employees hired offered proof to HR that anyone can work provided they enjoy the job tasks and have the support they need to complete them successfully.

Concerning policies, the HR Manager only needed to adjust one policy related to tardiness to allow for variability in arrival times due to a local (and nationwide) lack of reliable, accessible transportation options. It did not cost PENN EMBLEM to provide reasonable accommodations or adjustments to job tasks. PENN EMBLEM found the most commonly requested adjustment was flexible hours and scheduling.

To date, nearly a quarter of PENN EMBLEM's workforce has been hired and retained through the updated hiring processes that focus on sourcing talent differently and maximizing inclusion. Almost all the employees hired are meeting or exceeding production standards. The focus on inclusion has increased morale. PENN EMBLEM has seen an increase in retention rates; for those who have been with the company for 90 days, the retention rate is above 70%. During the interview for this case study, when asked about the rewarding parts of adding inclusion to HR, the manager said she enjoys focusing on inclusion because she feels like she is making a difference in the lives of others. She gets excited when employees hit their production standards, self-advocate, and share a desire to cross-train. She is most excited when employees try out new roles and expand their experience, especially when they go beyond what they believed was possible.

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## REFERENCES

Deichler, A. (2021, June 16th). Help wanted: Manufacturing sector struggles to fill jobs. Retrieved from SHRM website: <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/pages/help-wanted-manufacturing-sector-struggles-to-fill-jobs.aspx>