

DIVERSITY INCLUSION PROGRAM:



Penn Emblem
Companies



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INTRODUCTION – BECOMING AN INCLUSIVE LEADER

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.

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 found it hard to attract qualified applicants and turned to temporary workers, which 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 experiences of the Plant manager as she introduced inclusion into the workplace and created structures of support.

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). Owners, business leaders, and recruiters in the manufacturing industry are turning to new ways to attract and onboard talent, increasing diversity and inclusion.

ACTION

APENN EMBLEM addressed the Mira Loma plant in full as they announced a shift towards building an inclusive workplace. Leadership was on board and assured employees that they would support and manage the planned change to ensure its success. After the initial announcement, the plant manager noted some employees were apprehensive about the change and concerned that it would not succeed. As PENN's focus on inclusion took flight, however, feelings of apprehension shifted to increased morale. Employees became personally invested in the change, and they shared stories of friends and family with neurodivergent or disabled children.

PENN EMBLEM began with adjustments to the hiring processes to make it more accessible and learned to source talent differently. In doing so, the plant manager established new connections with job coaches and local/government employment agencies. Next, PENN EMBLEM updated its onboarding, interviewing, and training processes (as outlined in the HR Manager case study). A core element of the updates was to redevelop training materials for accessibility that supports multiple different learning styles. The new training processes provide continuous individual feedback and progress at the best-suited pace for the new hire.

During the initial work-based interviews, the hiring team met an applicant with mobility support needs. The team liked the applicant a lot, and the plant manager was determined to make successful adjustments to the workstation, but she was unsure what this would entail. She raised the desk and then relocated the workstation to the front for easy entry/exit. She was surprised at how easy and inexpensive the adjustments were; the cost of the adjustment was a sheet of plywood.

Another applicant with dexterity challenges wanted to work in inventory, which required finger dexterity. One job task was particularly challenging, and the employee became frustrated. The plant manager reassured the employee that the training department would produce a strategy. The proposed solution provided the employee time to practice in a relaxed and comfortable environment to focus on learning the task without worrying about speed and productivity. After a few extra hours of training time, the employee was up to total productivity.

The plant manager learned and gained experience throughout the organizational change process that made her aware of additional ways to support inclusive hiring. It was not long before employees joined in to further assist their new coworkers. They generated ideas and solutions to complex job tasks and helped new coworkers with continuous improvement. Other employees worked together with their new team members to design workspaces best suited to their needs to increase their overall success. The plant manager said the new employees come to work happy and elevated morale plant-wide.

RESULTS

When asked about the focus on inclusion, PENN EMBLEM's plant manager said, "We've made a change in people's lives – not only the new employees, but my life has changed along with the way I view people and the world in general." The organizational change also opened her mind to new ways of doing things, like updating the traditional interview style to a work-based interview. She feels the revised process and training materials improved the hiring experience for all applicants and allowed her to train new workers better and more efficiently.

One of the most significant outcomes for the plant manager was knowing she helped positively impact new and long-standing employees. She shared her joy in watching production workers in different departments support new employees and help them feel belonging.

PENN EMBLEM's working environment and inclusive approach made such a strong impression on some of the friends and family members of new hires that a handful changed their jobs to feel included at PENN EMBLEM.

The plant manager shared challenges at the start with feeling overwhelmed by the organizational change and having a general uncertainty about the outcome. There is still learning along the way, and on the go, she said, "There is always room for changes to processes and procedures, which supports the continuous improvement mentality required of a Lean Manufacturer like PENN EMBLEM."

In closing, PENN EMBLEM feels more connected to the local community now than ever before. When asked what she would tell other leaders considering inclusion, the Plant manager said, "Be like Nike, 'Just Do It!' You have nothing to lose; your company is going to grow, you are going to grow as a person, you will see the changes you are making in your staff and for the new hires. Your customer service changes, culture positively changes, and the image of your company in the world changes. "You couldn't ask for anything more!"

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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>

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