

DIVERSITY INCLUSION PROGRAM:



Penn Emblem
Companies



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INTRODUCTION

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 elevated turnover and COVID supply chain shortages. The shortages require PENN EMBLEM to produce materials typically sourced through vendors. Like the rest of the manufacturing sector, they too 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 a more significant number of applications from a more diverse applicant pool. PENN EMBLEM intentionally concentrates on increasing the representation of disabled and neurodivergent employees in the workforce. This case study will reflect the efforts of one supervisor and their quest to support the inclusive agenda. To this day, her department's new-hire retention rate is high and soars above industry norms.

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

COVID impacted overall spending and costs for PENN EMBLEM. As the inclusive journey began, leads and supervisors were tasked with supporting the change. One supervisor stood out right from the beginning. The supervisor was an asset to the shift. However, they had no prior experience working with or supervising disabled or neurodivergent employees. The shipping and receiving department is unlike most of the other jobs on the production floor due to its focus on quality. Instead of having a production standard, this department's job is to ensure that the PENN EMBLEM production quality standards are met for each product shipped and destined for a customer.

It quickly became evident that a new training process would increase inclusion success. The supervisor took it upon themselves to create a training packet. The training packet included everything the employee would need to know in one place. She completed the process a second time for shipping. Next, each task was broken down into segments. The supervisor began to train new employees one task at a time, and once the task was learned, she moved on to the next one. About the new employees, she said, "The task is not difficult. You just have to make sure that you have the training tools they need and be willing to spend time to work with them."

The supervisor was diligent in creating awareness, natural support, and providing feedback to those with concerns or questions about the focus on inclusion. If coworkers were unsure about social engagement, she helped guide them. She compassionately managed the new employees while learning their preferred communication styles and most effective times to engage. Her person-centered management style was key to the success and retention of new employees. When complications arose, she challenged herself to develop solutions. She came to know when it was time to relocate the employee to a new department to retain them.

RESULTS

After six months, the department is enjoying a 100% retention rate. All employees are working together, and performance numbers are on track. The changes to the training structure and producing training packets benefited all new employees. Training and onboarding are organized, and the process is no longer overwhelming for new hires. After the process was complete, the supervisor stated that she wished she had created training materials and methods she uses now, sooner, and for all employees. She feels that onboarding the new employees was a revelation of why other new hires left soon after their start day.

In the first few days, the supervisor was presented with their communication challenges. The new employees did not always socially engage expectedly. She initially found it difficult when employees provided one-word feedback, did not exhibit the same facial expressions, or communicated in a different style. She overcame this and began to see them for themselves and the new employees' strengths to the department.

This department was not the only one involved in the inclusion strategy. Many others have enjoyed the same retention rate, but some have done much worse. It has become clear that the success of the strategy is largely due to the supervisor's acceptance, compassion, and management style. The organization has shifted quickly in six months and now enjoys the productivity and retention of the inclusive hires, which now make up 23% of the overall workforce.

Would you like to start your inclusion journey? Each inclusion journey is as unique as your company. Let us chart you a course for.

www.gritandflow.com

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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