



CASE STUDY

Making Good Leadership Even Better

Accelerating safety excellence at an agricultural products producer.

Situation

The Florida-based operations of this phosphates business had already received an Agri-Business of the year award for contributions to the long-term future of agriculture in the region when it decided to improve its safety leadership. Made up of three major facilities over a four-mile radius, the 620-employee operation has an annual capacity of 3.6 million tons of phosphate rock and 1 million tons of phosphoric acid. Maintaining this level of production, and its status as the low-cost producer in the industry, is serious business that takes high-functioning leaders at all levels. When the Florida operations implemented an employee-driven safety system early in 2004, they recognized the need to develop even better coordination across areas and functions as they captured data on exposure to risk. Managing resources across such a large area would require finely-tuned alignment on what the company wanted to accomplish and how.

Solution

Leaders at this location knew that one of the keys to creating alignment would be conveying a strong safety vision. If they could articulate where they wanted the company to

Less than a year after starting the new initiative, the company reduced its injury rate by more than 50% and enjoyed a six-month streak without a recordable injury.

be in the future and how it was going to get there, they could determine the amount of time and resources to put into safety. They recognized the need for all leaders, from the process facilitators on up, to maintain a consistent message in their words and actions. So, when a corporate-wide initiative called for managers at all sites to engage in leadership development, the managers jumped at the chance: they wanted to use their development activities to become better at articulating and implementing a safety vision for the company's 620 employees.

The management team invited DEKRA to design a solution that would help them meet their goals. DEKRA recommended assessing the leadership characteristics of each leader. This included the facilitators of the employee-driven safety processes in the management group. Results showed that many of the company's managers were already strong and influential leaders and that they were respected by others

in the organization. However, even the strongest leaders experienced diminishing effectiveness across the locations or outside of their immediate workgroup; their vision for safety wasn't getting through.

Before crafting a leadership development strategy, DEKRA worked with the client's leaders—including the facilitator—to define, in behavioral terms, what their vision of safety was. A DEKRA consultant also challenged them to include safety in their strategic thinking of the business, asking questions such as: What does safety really mean to your organization? Where does it fit in the scheme of other objectives and initiatives? What does it mean to your place in the market and the bottom line? With an emphasis on helping leaders reframe their thinking of their role in safety, the DEKRA consultant helped the group develop a list of principles to define their actions. These included: Uphold the safety regulations even if cost or production is at stake; Communicate frequently and effectively up, down and across the organization; Ensure that people have the information, authority and resources they need; Treat others with dignity and respect.

Leaders worked individually with DEKRA consultants to design personal strategies for improving their interactions with those who report to them, and enacting their new vision. In particular, they had to define what their successes would look like. DEKRA then helped them identify ways to gain feedback on how well they measured up to the newly framed safety

At a Glance:

- Three major facilities over a four-mile radius
- Leaders developed a comprehensive vision of their objectives in safety, including a list of principles to guide their personal safety activities and touchpoints
- Within a year, reduced injury rate by more than 50%

values. Once the managers had drafted their individual plans, they worked with DEKRA to trickle the safety vision down through the organization more effectively by coaching their own reports and helping them develop similar coaching plans for themselves.

Results

Less than a year after starting the new initiative, the company reduced its injury rate by more than 50% and enjoyed a six-month streak without a recordable injury. And within just a few months of defining their new safety vision and starting their personal action plans, most leaders were able to document changes in their relationship with departments, showing that the new safety vision is working.