

Neal Electric

The Leadership Improvement Process

Neal Electric participated in a leadership development program with Simon Vetter of Alexcel Group to improve the company's culture and performance.

The Need for Change

Before Clark Thompson became CEO of Neal Electric, the company went through some major changes. Neal Electric was sold to a public company, and immediately after was sold again to an even bigger company.

As a new CEO, Thompson faced several challenges: "I remember the organization went through an awful lot of change. We had transferred complete ownership of the company twice in the previous year, and with that we had a substantial turnover in personnel. The team consisted of many strong individual performers that needed to work together to accomplish bigger goals. We were dealing with very headstrong personalities as well as some negative attitudes."

The existing culture was one in which managers based decisions based on advancing the position of their department or themselves, not the entire company. The objective was to bring them closer together, help them work together as a team, and to unify the managers.

“My challenge was to take the management group and the culture in general, and drive it forward in a positive manner. Although I had some very skilled managers, we didn’t always mesh so well as a team,” Thompson says. He wanted to build a high-performing management team with high-performing individuals who were able to learn from each other instead of working against each other. As a result, the company would provide higher-quality customer service and be more successful and competitive.

This required the management team to understand that for the entire company to succeed, the whole company had to function as a high-performing team. **The biggest challenge was getting the entire team to commit to this program and to demonstrate a true desire to better oneself, the team, and the company.**

The Framework

Thompson consulted the Alexcel Group and hired Simon Vetter, who brought along two associate business coaches, Linda Shaffer-Vanaria and Bill Hawkins. Together they established a one-year program with the purpose of developing leadership skills and implementing behavioral changes for the managers at Neal Electric.

- Create a leadership model and define effective behaviors based on the company’s values
- Conduct a 360-degree assessment with an individual coaching feedback session for each manager
- Identify a behavior to improve and create a commitment to change that behavior
- Measure behavioral change with a follow-up survey

First, the Neal Electric management team worked with Vetter to create a leadership framework that consisted of three major values (the 3 R's): **Respect, Responsiveness, and Results**. Specific behaviors were then defined for each of the company values.

With the use of individual 360-degree reports, each manager received feedback on the identified set of behaviors. Based on those results, each of the 10 managers participating in the leadership coaching program chose one particular behavior to improve and commit to over the course of the year.

Each manager reached out to coworkers and asked for help in changing their behavior. At the same time, the coworkers were advised to follow guidelines when supporting the managers in their efforts to change:

- Let go of the past and focus on the future;
- Be helpful and supporting, not cynical or judgmental; and
- Tell the truth and let the manager know if she or he has changed over time.

After one year, a follow-up survey was conducted and each manager was evaluated and measured by coworkers on how much they had changed their behavior.

The most important improvement was that the quality of communication among people at all levels and among every department significantly increased. This gave new cohesiveness to the organization.

“Two of my senior managers had a bit of a rivalry going on, and it wasn’t good for the company. Both of them came to me individually and then to each other to say they were really motivated to try and look for strengths in the other individual and how to work with them,” says Thompson.

Nick Bernabe, VP of Operations, decided to improve his behavior to hold others more accountable for their actions and commitments. In his testimonial he states, “I learned to portray a more confident and outgoing attitude. I was working on my confidence and stepping up on important company issues, not in a pompous way but more, ‘I am one of the leaders of this company, and I do what I’ve got to do to make this company more profitable.’”

Results and Business Impact

The managers’ willingness to work on behavioral change has turned Neal Electric into a unique company with leaders who are interested in their employees and work together as a team.

Sam Passanisi, one of Neal Electric’s senior project managers, recalls the benefits of the coaching program: “I think the productivity is better. People portray better attitudes and take more initiative to approach things on their own rather than waiting to be told. In the past three years I’ve seen a big change with management and leadership. It’s changed all around; it’s really impressive. It’s more cohesive than it was before and it’s getting better every day. I have enjoyed working here more than ever because of the cohesiveness, the improved teamwork and culture.”