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Smart Leaders

Terry Taylor

President and CEO, Wright Tool Co.

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When Terry Taylor joined Wright Tool Co. in 1969, the era's confrontational managerial style was becoming an impediment to success. A pervading "us versus them" mentality lingered between supervisors and employees at the tool manufacturing company, and progress was inhibited by inadequate channels of communication. In the late '70s, Taylor hoped to change all of that. He envisioned groups of people working together to better understand the company and how to achieve success. More than 30 years later, the leader's vision has become a reality. Taylor, now president and CEO, mandates that each of his 160 employees participates in quality systems, sounding-board meetings and the continuous improvement of the company. This team-based initiative has led to revenue growth of 10 percent in each of the past five years. *Smart Business* spoke with Taylor about internal auditors, Six Sigma and how to end meetings on the most positive of notes.

Stress interpersonal skills training. It's difficult to be participative, listen and use good interpersonal skills.

It takes more skill to do that than to be autocratic and say, 'Go do this and that because I

said so.' It's difficult to get people and have them train properly and have them actually do it.

Management has to be trained in good interpersonal skills, and they have to demonstrate that. The CEO or president has to support that by using some of the same skills and techniques.

Today, there're a lot of great resources out there to utilize. Universities today offer a great education in the Six Sigma method of continuous improvement.

There're also some really good things through ASQ [American Society for Quality] and ASTD [American Society for Training and Development]. Those are groups that your human resources, your quality person and, certainly, the manager need to get training on.

We do put our supervisors through interpersonal skills training. There are definite behavior patterns that people can say, 'This is how you respond in this situation.' You can role-play and practice and do those things.

Once you get them using this behavior and see the results, then the feedback is positive and you get a good circle going.

Once you've trained employees, retrain them. Periodically, you need to go back and retrain. Anybody can say, 'I trained him, and I'm done,' or, 'I got trained myself, and I'm done.' You need to go back and retrain yourself and retrain people and make sure (to cover) anything new or anything that's kind of fallen by the wayside.

I'm kind of a behaviorist. I believe that, if you behave in a certain way, you'll get certain results. And as you behave in that way and get those results, then your feedback is positive, so you, in turn, want to behave in that way more than you have in the past.

Keep communication open. Your goal is to continually improve your process. You're looking for ideas and ways and things that are going to help you improve in your efficiencies.

By allowing people to be more participative, typically they will respond by helping you be more effective and more efficient in your processes. And you reduce the 'we-them' situations that companies had for many years.

There's not a lot of walls that we want to create between people because of their particular title. We want to have it more open, so that our VP of finance can talk to anybody, our chairman can talk to anybody, and they do.

When I'm in the facility, I do 'walk the rounds,' as they used to be called. I think it's good to do that. Say 'hi' and talk to people and let them see you. It's real important to have impromptu meetings with the managers. Sit down and talk with them. How are they doing?

Review their numbers.

It's great because people know you and can talk to supervisors and to managers. It's very open and very honest communication. They feel comfortable with saying things that in other facilities you might not be able to say. That's really healthy to do that.

End on a positive note. We have sounding-board meetings with the employees. At the sounding-board meeting, we try to use some of the aspects of *appreciative inquiry*.

At the end of our meeting, we like to say, 'OK, let's think about what's really great about here, what we really like about here, what we need to continue to do here, and what can we change to make our lives better?'

There are little aspects of things that can help us recognize what a good thing we have and how to keep it good and how to keep it improving.

Stress the big picture. In part of the training, you need to take the person through all of the processes that are related to their process. It could be an office process. I'm not just talking about manufacturing.

They need to understand how the things that they receive and their output affects others in the company, their suppliers and their customers, and how that overall affects the vision of the company.

Have internal auditors in (the) quality system. That really helps people learn more about the company, and it gives them an opportunity to come and sit down in front of the president and CEO and other people and ask them questions about the quality systems in the company.

Internal auditing is really good because now you have a person that's been working on their particular process for a few years, and now they have an opportunity to go out and audit once they get some training to audit other processes.

We give them direction in what they ask, and we rotate that so people have opportunities to be an auditor. They have to learn a little about what's done, and then they have a checklist of asking how it's done and is it being done.

It's allowing them to see more beyond their own and ask some questions. They're learning more about the business.

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