

Web: www.in-a.co.uk
Tel: 01256 316 530
Fax: 01256 316 559

Case Study: Union Negotiation
Client: Wiggins Teape/GPMU

Overview: The union and senior management had major ongoing conflicts and disagreements, to the point where the business was on a downturn. It was critical that resolutions and new agreements were found through negotiation so that customer service improved, the business moved forward and the employees were able to work in a productive environment.

Issues

1. Complete disharmony due to an autocratic and hierarchical management style which was head to head with the union power.
2. Breakdown of communication on both sides. A lack of understanding of the other side's point of view resulted in a "them and us" culture.
3. Negotiations were a battlefield with a win/lose confrontational mentality.
4. Loss of business to the competition, due to low productivity, time consuming negotiations and a hostile environment.
5. The union controlled the majority of the workforce. This influenced promotions, a sick absence rota and overtime manipulation. Pay was not a motivator due to other union overtime agreements with Fleet Street.
6. No trust on either "side", an abusive, aggressive and accusing environment, due to scars of injustice and bitterness.

Results

1. The changes were rejected in the 1st round vote, as the format was an open show of hands which resulted in the workforce following the leader.
2. The changes were accepted with a 2nd vote, the format was an individual, confidential ballot.
3. 6 working directives implemented involving changes in working patterns, structured breaks and a reduction in the overtime available
4. A better working relationship.
5. Two way proactive communication.
6. Acceptable behaviour with a conducive working environment.
7. A change in language patterns
8. A reasonable precedent for the future giving a firm base to move forward and work together.
9. A culture of responsibility to understand all points of view, needs and feelings.

How the results were achieved

1. A behaviour change of the HR Manager, walking the shop floor and approaching employees directly, this was a key difference.
2. Clearly stated importance of the desired outcomes and explained the options with a dedicated and determined approach.
3. The wider picture was communicated to the workforce. This created an awareness of the consequences if the company continued to lose business.
4. Connected with emotions and acknowledged feelings, avoided point scoring.
5. Discovered the natural justice in the argument and appealed to true values, not learnt behaviours.
6. Gave feedback related to each individual, which connected a feeling of ownership and responsibility.
7. Told a story of "where we are" and "where we are going" with metaphors and analogies.
8. Assigned a project team with representatives from both sides.
9. Focus on deep structure "walking in the other persons shoes" to understand values, beliefs systems, identity and purpose.

"As a senior officer in a major trade union I spent many years leading negotiations with employers', federations and major multi national companies. Although In-a Coaching were sitting on the other side of the table, they had a genuine concern for the workforce, and shared a common goal of making the world of work a better place to be.

Unfortunately I have seen far too much of the other extreme, with major companies failing because they could not see beyond their immediate short-term goals. In my experience the really successful companies were inevitably those who invested time and effort in the training and well being of the workforce. The same mature attitude would be demonstrated at the negotiating table and although undoubtedly difficult at times, both sides should be able to come away feeling they have gained from the experience. Working in this way and by building an equal partnership, the company would not only survive but move on to achieve its long term goals."

Ray Williams, Former General President of Graphic Paper and Media Union