



Why did you transition from Aerospace Engineering to Recognition and Incentives?

I'm often asked about why I transitioned my career from Industrial Engineer in an Aerospace company to an Employee Recognition Expert and Consultant. It's actually a pretty interesting story.

When I graduated from ASU in 1980 I went to work on the IE team supporting the Wheel Line at Garrett Turbine Engine Company (part of Honeywell today). There were three production lines, Wheels, Gears and Cases that made all of the components of a Auxiliary Power Unit (APU) used on most commercial aircraft.

Wheel Line produced all of the various turbine wheels that go into an engine. One in particular required a slice to be made into the hub between each curved blade and a rivet to be added to allow the wheel to flex under load. It was one of the last of 250 manufacturing operations from a raw casting to a finish turbine wheel, so mistakes in making these cuts and scraping a part this late in the production process was very costly and could even cause the monthly build schedule to fall behind . . . not good!

We ran three shifts, 24 hours a day, and I was over the time standards for all of the wheel line processes. In reviewing the steps in making this particular turbine wheel, I noticed that the guy on the night shift was able to get between 20 and 25 cuts before he had to change the copper electrode on the Electronic Discharge Machine (EDM) that made these precise, curved slices through the inner hub. The day shift and swing shift guys were get 4-5 cuts per electrode; that's a really big disparity!

Every time the operator changed the electrode they had to reset up the machine and make a test cut to assure that the settings were correct. This took time, but also risked scraping a part, so essentially, that night shift operator was 4 times as likely to produce a successful part than day or swing shift and that's a huge risk reduction that we wanted to understand.

I stayed late one night and talked to this operator to get a better idea of what he was doing differently than the other two shifts, but it wasn't immediately obvious to me, and he knew it. He had come up with some setting that kept the electrode from burning up as quickly as the other guys, but he wouldn't share the secret.

As a young, ambitious IE, I was frustrated. Why wouldn't this guy be sharing his wonderful productivity secret with the other shifts or with me? Didn't everyone come to work to give their best, share their ideas and work to make the best turbine engines they could?

That was my recognition and incentive lightbulb moment. This guy was easily making his rate, sitting back, drinking coffee and reading the newspaper. He believed that if he shared his secret, my team would raise the production rate and he'd be on the hook to work harder for the same pay, as would the operators on the other shift, which would not be appreciated.

I never looked at it that way but began to realize that it's not his fault. It's the fault of Garrett leadership. We had not made him feel like his input and ideas were valuable, rather it would make his job and that of his fellow operators more challenging. We hadn't created any meaningful incentives for him to help improve production, so he used his newly found secret to make his life easier . . . couldn't blame him.

That's when I began to learn about and develop a meaningful incentive program for all three shifts that would allow them to earn value for sharing ideas that reduced setups and scrap risk. All we had to do was implement three rather simple concepts:

1. Begin to focus on treating the Wheel Line employees in a way that earned their trust, so they would naturally want to help the business be as successful as possible.
2. Make it worth their while financially to look for productivity improvements and bring them to the IE for implementation. My team worked to educate them on the fact that our time standards were not about making them produce more parts per hour, but to determine the actual cost of the parts.
3. Communicate with all three shifts to make it easy for them to transition from one operator to the next seamlessly, reducing set up time at shift changes. Here again, the secret is trust and consistency from management.

While I showed savings of over \$1M per year just on the Wheel Line, upper management never implemented my ideas. I suppose I was ahead of my time, but now I'm happy to say that I've spent the past 25 years helping other companies do this very thing.

Since I made my job transition I've learned a lot about recognition, employee engagement and performance management. I've seen how different types of employees, different generations and different job titles respond to opportunities to participate in growing their company and giving it a competitive advantage. But no matter the industry, the age of the employees or any other demographic, the key to every successful program always comes back to it Trust, Respect and Consistency.

When we launch programs with our clients and train managers to make them effective, we spend a lot of time on these key communication skills. I call it "*Making it Real*" and it focuses on being Genuine, Believable and treating employees like people first and workers second.