

Sales per Employee Jump 15% and Quality Improves 50% after Crucial Conversations



INDUSTRY: Manufacturing

The world leader in PVC-coated conduit electrical equipment, Robroy Industries manufactures conduits and non-metallic enclosures for the electrical and oil field industries.

THE OPPORTUNITY

How do you take an already disciplined and finely tuned organization to even higher productivity and record-breaking levels of performance? That was the challenge facing the leaders of Robroy Industries' conduit division when they chose to include Crucial Conversations® Training as one of the programs offered to employees.

A privately owned, family-run business, Robroy Industries was founded in 1905. Today, the organization is the world leader in PVC-coated conduit electrical equipment.

Known in the industry for impeccable efficiency, the division credits its world-class performance orientation to continual measurement efforts that allow executives to quickly analyze and adjust. So after closely following their assessment process for hiring and personal development, the company's leaders knew that, "something was missing," said President and COO David Marshall. "It appears that many people talk one story during the hiring process but deliver a different one after they are hired."

Employees who had high scores on their pre-hire assessments were underperforming on the job—especially in regards to engagement, productivity, and quality. Marshall and his team believed they were hiring the right people, but perceived that many employees' previous experiences led them to believe that other organizations are satisfied with less than what Robroy expected.

With data in hand, division leaders considered the skill sets that self-motivated individuals would be eager to improve, and they also sought to deliver training that would provide real value in terms of impact on business results.

"People must accept that there are varying levels of experience within a manufacturing operation. For example, the requirements of a production worker and the requirements for a marketing professional are very different," Marshall said. "However, every employee has to interrelate to create a cohesive whole. And in most interactions, the stronger personality will set the expectation or agenda. So, we needed training that could level out some of the intellectual inhibitions."



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THE SOLUTION

Robroy chose Crucial Conversations Training not only because it was recommended by one of their valued trainers, but also because it was known to deliver the biggest impact.

In 2006, Robroy began sending its management and first-line supervisors through Crucial Conversations and then rolled it out to office personnel, including accounting, marketing, and inside sales. By late 2007, the division had trained sixty employees. The company now sends all its new hires through the program.

Marshall emphasized that the firm's existing culture of discipline and self-motivation was key to the training's effectiveness.

Today, Marshall ensures engagement among his employees with a thorough method of measuring progress. The trainer administers a quiz at the beginning of each training session based on what was covered the week prior. Marshall personally reviews the scores.

"All of life is a test," he explained. "If there is no stress associated with it, there is no imperative to retain. If there is no imperative to retain, what is the point in doing it? I do expect to see the results, and if there isn't full participation by everybody, I have a decision to make."

THE RESULT

How does Marshall know the training is working? "Because we measure everything," he said. "The quantifiable results of what the individual has to accomplish can be measured."

Thanks to the improved communication and positive behavior change that resulted from the division's training program, sales per

employee went up by 15 percent between 2005 and 2007, and profit per employee tracked that jump. The division's product reject rate improved by 50 percent, and on-time shipments improved from 90 percent to 94 percent. Additionally, the unionized location recorded no grievances during 2007.

Due to the impressive improvements in his workforce, Marshall celebrated the second consecutive record revenue year in 2007—the sixth record year in the 103-year history of the business.

The impact on company productivity is highlighted best with first-line supervisors because they interact most with hourly production workers. Marshall says those supervisors are now more direct.

One aspect of the Crucial Conversations Training in particular that impressed Marshall was that the role playing he saw among his employees dealt with real-life, sensitive issues. Marshall cited one example where Crucial Conversations enabled bottom-up communication. A first-line supervisor had to tell a vice president that her methodology was poor. "Both survived it and both were better for it," he said.

Based on anonymous evaluations of the course, employees love the training, too. One wrote that trainers should get this concept into society's educational system.

Robroy found that having employees practice crucial conversations was key to providing common ground among those with varying levels of expertise. In particular, it gave all employees a common vocabulary and skill set they could quickly apply. For example, executives say they frequently hear employees ask each other to "get to the facts," or speak up to a coworker by asking, "Are those the facts, or is that a story you're telling yourself?"

Furthermore, employees who find themselves "stuck" with a communication problem now seek out others who have completed the course to talk through the principles and achieve a clearer plan to move forward.

"One of the things I love about these skills is that they motivate people to have conversations that in the past they would have had with all the wrong people," says Robroy's certified trainer Suzi Streit, pointing out that people often complain about problems with others, but rarely discuss them with those at issue.

The success of Crucial Conversations at Robroy doesn't surprise Streit—such victories are why she recommends the program. "I feel strongly that there's no one whose life cannot be changed by Crucial Conversations."

RESULTS AT A GLANCE:

- Sales per employee improved 15 percent and profit per employee tracked that jump
- The division's product reject rate declined 50 percent
- On-time shipments improved from 90 percent to 94 percent
- The unionized location recorded no grievances during 2007
- The company celebrated their second consecutive record revenue year in 2007

About Crucial Conversations® Training—Whenever you're not getting the results you're looking for, it's likely that a crucial conversation is keeping you stuck. Whether it's a problem with poor quality, slow time-to-market, declining customer satisfaction, or a strained relationship, if you can't talk honestly, you can expect poor results.

This award-winning training infuses classroom time with original video clips and examples. Course pacing is active and engaging, with structured rehearsals and intense class participation. The Crucial Conversations course delivers a powerful set of influence tools that builds teams, enriches relationships, and improves end results. Participants acquire the skills that help them step up to and handle high-stakes issues.

About VitalSmarts—VitalSmarts is an innovator in corporate training and organizational performance. The company is home to the award-winning Crucial Conversations® Training and *New York Times* bestselling book of the same title, *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*. VitalSmarts has been ranked twice by *Inc.* magazine as one of the fastest growing companies in America and has trained more than 500,000 people worldwide. www.vitalsmarts.com