

# Case Study

## Making Good Leadership Even Better:

Accelerating excellence at an agricultural products producer

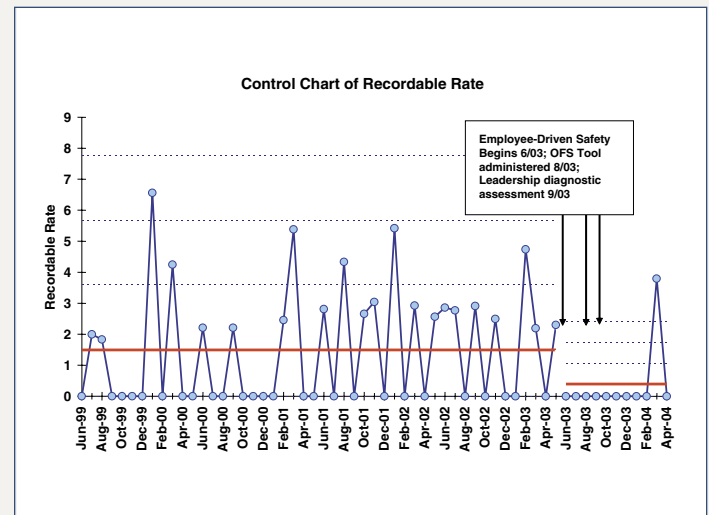
The Florida operations of this phosphates business had already received an Agri-Business of the year award when it decided to improve its safety leadership. Made up of three major facilities over a four-mile radius, the 620-employee operation has an annual capacity of 3.6 million tons of phosphate rock and 1 million tons of phosphoric acid. Maintaining this level of production, and its status as the low-cost producer in the industry, is serious business that takes high functioning leaders at all levels in three facilities. When the Florida operations implemented an employee-driven safety system early in 2004, it recognized the need to develop even better coordination across areas and functions as it captured data on exposure to risk. Each location had its own facilitator to oversee process activities, however managing resources across such a large area would require finely-tuned alignment on what the company wanted to accomplish and how.

### Developing a Vision

Leaders at this location knew that one of the keys to creating alignment would be fostering a strong safety vision. If they could articulate where they wanted the company to be in the future and how it was going to get there, they could in turn determine the kind of time and resources to put into safety. The key was making sure that all leaders, from the process facilitators on up, had the skills to maintain a consistent message in their words and actions. So when a corporate-wide initiative called for managers at all sites to engage in leadership development, the managers jumped at the chance: they wanted to use their development activities to become better at articulating and implementing a safety vision for the company's 620 employees.

The management team invited BST to design a solution that would help them meet their goals. BST helped the client assess the leadership characteristics of each leader. This included the facilitators of the employee-driven safety processes in the management group. Results showed that many of these leaders were already strong and influential and that they were viewed positively by others in the organization. However even the strongest leaders tended to experience diminishing effectiveness across the locations or outside of their immediate workgroup.

Before crafting a leadership development strategy, BST worked with the client's leaders—including the facilitator—to define what their vision of safety was. Working with this group of leaders, a BST consultant challenged them to think outside of traditional safety visions and articulate their own vision in strategic terms. By asking questions like, What does safety really mean to your organization? Where does it fit in the scheme of other objectives and initiatives? What does it mean to your place in the market and the bottom line?, the BST consultant was able to help the leaders reframe their thinking of leadership in safety. As a result, they



developed a list of principles that they wanted to define their actions: Uphold the safety regulations even if cost or production is at stake, Communicate frequently and effectively up, down and across the organization, Ensure that people have the information, authority and resources they need, Treat others with dignity and respect.

With a clear picture of what they wanted their leadership to look like, they then worked individually with BST consultants to design personal strategies for improving their interactions with those who report to them, and enacting their new vision. In particular, they had to define what their successes would look like. BST then helped them identify ways to gain feedback on how well they measured up to the new safety values. Once the managers had drafted their individual plans, they worked with BST to trickle the new safety vision down through the organization more effectively by learning how to coach their own reports and help them develop similar coaching plans for themselves.

### Outcomes

Less than a year after starting the new initiative, the client was able to reduce its injury rate by more than half, including a six-month streak without a recordable injury. And within just a few months of defining their new safety vision and starting their personal action plans, most leaders were able to document changes in their relationship with departments, showing that the new safety vision is working.

