

Improved productivity through workplace literacy training

Fletcher Aluminium Ltd.

- “Since the training programme began, production wastage has reduced by nearly 40%.”
- “On time delivery of the right product has improved by 8% to national customers and 11% for export deliveries.”
- “Lost time due to injuries has reduced to zero. We haven’t had a lost time injury in almost three years.”

Fletcher Aluminium’s vision is to provide the best and most innovative architectural systems in every market in which they operate. Fletcher Aluminium, a business unit of the Fletcher Building Group, has identified that constant innovation is essential for the success of its business.

Human Resources Manager, Warwick Milbank, says to innovate successfully, staff at all levels of the company need to feel empowered to think and act in new ways; continuously improving how they work, as well as the products and services they produce and deliver.

“Over the past three years, we have successfully implemented a range of productivity and training initiatives to improve quality and communication and awareness of the company’s health and safety guidelines. While it is difficult to attribute the improvements we have seen to literacy training alone, without the literacy training, the successful outcomes would not have been possible.

Improved Communication

Around 85% of our workforce of over 200 are Pasifika and other ethnicities, who speak English as a second language, so it was important to build communication skills in order to achieve the company’s strategic goals.

“We have successfully implemented a range of initiatives to improve performance and productivity across the business. We know that this success would not have been possible without literacy training.”

Warwick Milbank, Human Resources Manager



Limited English language skills prevented employees from fully understanding quality standards and procedures including health and safety. Some employees avoided using email altogether and many never read notices or newsletters.

Workbase’s literacy training programme was based on analysing the literacy, language and numeracy skills needed for our operation. The literacy training supported initiatives by strengthening the skills employees need to do their jobs effectively and to understand and participate in continuous improvement.

Improving employees’ confidence and ability to communicate in English means employees are now better able to ask questions, offer feedback and participate in meetings. Problem solving and critical thinking training has helped our employees anticipate problems and identify solutions.

Improved quality and customer satisfaction

In order to provide the best solutions for customers, we make a wide range of complex designs. This means employees need higher levels of literacy and numeracy skills so they can understand product specifications, read graphs to monitor their performance, and use the computer to track orders.

We need to continuously improve the quality of the product made and the level of customer satisfaction we provide. Every employee needs to check the product against specifications, as well as identifying and reporting any problems as they occur.

To improve quality, employees needed to be able to understand how and why problems occur. To ensure quality outcomes for our customers, employees needed the communication skills to identify and remove the obstacles to quality outcomes. The training developed employees' skills in reading workplace documentation including lot cards and pick lists, standard operating procedures and emails.

To ensure that calculations and measurements were carried out accurately, the training developed maths skills focusing on employees' understanding of weights and measures, calculating percentages, and understanding company performance data.

Quality outcomes have improved for both external customers and internal customers in other departments. Our main measure of customer service is IFOTIS – (In full, on time and in spec). On time delivery of the right product has improved by 8% to national customers and 11% for export deliveries.

Employee engagement and self managing teams

Self-managing teams support people to take the initiative and be accountable for meeting targets, as well as being involved in quality and continuous improvement. We want our employees to recognise problems and work in teams to resolve them, so that they become part of the process of improving the way we do things.

We have seen improvements in the dynamics of self-managing teams. People have a clearer sense of purpose, greater confidence and pride in their capacity to do good work, and increased commitment to our company goals. Many employees were too shy or nervous to speak up or contribute at meetings and were uncomfortable speaking English in front of a group.

Since the training programme started three years ago, the number of initiatives suggested by employees is up by almost 80%. There is an overall feeling that staff are encouraged to be creative and responsible in their work.



People become more involved in understanding the business and how to make decisions and are able to make decisions themselves. It moves people from being robots, and leaving their brains at the door to actually helping us improve the business directly.

Improved health and safety

Health and safety is a priority for our company, with strict guidelines in place. Aluminium is extruded at around 500°C and corrosive chemicals are also used in the surface finishing processes.

We are legally required to involve staff in identifying hazards and reporting incidents, but to do this they need to have the necessary literacy and language skills. Having a safety committee is only one part of the picture. We need to be meeting compliance requirements at every level.

There is a greater awareness of company values and an understanding of safety. Lost time due to injuries has reduced to zero. We haven't had a lost time injury in almost three years.

As a result of Workbase's literacy training programme, we know our staff now understand safe job practices and can take responsibility for continuously working safely."

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