

## UNILEVER SAYS: COACHING MAKES SENSE IN THESE CREDIT CRUNCH TIMES

Unilever UK, the UK flagship site in Leeds, has been putting even more investment into developing its people. The site manufactures many well known aerosol and roll ons such as Lynx, Sure, and Dove. Over the past 2 years an intensive programme of upskilling has been developing the operational staff, to enable them to operate effectively in the new Cell Structure now in place. The change has meant recruiting Cell Leaders and Cell Engineers to head up a number of cells to work in an autonomous way. In the new structure most of the leaders are on site during day hours. The imperative was to ensure teams are empowered to make decisions and take action without their leaders directing them, so that they can work more effectively and efficiently and take decisions when their leaders are not there.

For the 6 months prior to implementation a culture change process was developed by Mike Boyle, Factory Manager and his team, alongside ADG a management development consultancy from Preston, Lancs. Anita Wild and Mark Lewthwaite have worked closely with Maggie Withington, Performance Coach and Tracey Wilson, Learning and Development Leader, to put in place a progressive process to enable leaders to have the skills to empower their people.

Maggie Withington said:

“We had identified an urgent need to focus a key strand from our Project Pride process, this was to ensure all leaders had the knowledge and understanding about culture change that would enable them to make the new structure work. We chose to work with ADG as they have worked with us over a long period. They understand our people and our ways and work in a partnership way to help us to achieve our objectives”.

The very practical process that was developed is shown below. It began with all leaders attending workshops on:-

- Enabling Pride – Understanding the importance of developing commitment and pride in the workforce. The real reasons for change were highlighted, and what could happen without change discussed. Further Focus was on the 3 keys to empowerment: Identifying

Boundaries, Sharing as much as possible with the people, Developing the Teams.

- Leading with Pride – This workshop looked at leadership priorities and styles and enabled leaders to understand the importance of coaching as a style for the future – a way to develop the people.
- Gaining Commitment – This workshop was important as it focused on how leaders could gain commitment to the changes from their people. A number of techniques were used from accelerated learning methodology and NLP to build the tools the leaders could use back at work.

At this point the new structure took place. To ensure the leaders keep building their skills and competences to move the organisation forward they are now all enrolled on a Coaching Programme.

Anita Wild, Director, ADG said:

“We are supporting Unilever UK in Leeds to develop a coaching culture. For real empowerment to work it is leaders and managers who need to let go and let people take responsibility – this is not an easy thing for a lot of managers to do. When they can see a solution they want to tell people what to do and how to do it. In the Unilever scenario everyone knows the leaders will not be there all the time, they also want to make the most of the abilities of all the people, to do this the people need to have the ability to direct themselves. Coaching as a management style and method can enable this empowerment. Rather than giving answers, leaders are asking more questions to develop the thinking of their people”.

ADG is a Chartered Management Institute Centre and the coaching process is being underpinned by a CMI Qualification, ‘The Introductory Diploma in Coaching and Mentoring’. Following a 1 day practical workshop leaders are meeting monthly in small groups to enhance their coaching skills. They are involved in an action learning approach to enable them to share their experiences and develop their competence. The topics being covered are:-

- Coaching tools and techniques
- Organisation Development
- Influencing skills
- Motivation and Learning
- Evaluating the Outcomes

To support their development further all coaches have a Coach Supervisor and develop a reflective coaching log.

Tracey Wilson, L&D Manager said:

“We believe that building a coaching culture will enable us to develop and sustain the new culture on the site, and ensure the people on the site have the skills to keep on moving forward. I am one of the coaching supervisors and I am working with ADG to develop my supervision skills and to become an Accredited member of the Association for Coaching”

Mike Boyle, Factory Manager finished by saying:

“It is very important that the new structure and culture change processes work. We have invested time and money in our people to achieve a long term sustained change. I am working closely with ADG to ensure all leaders are supported to make this difference. Our motto has been that we want to be ‘Doing things differently and better’. Its early days but everyone is pulling together to make this happen.

If you are interested in any of the ideas here, or have any comments please contact:-

Anita Wild on 01772 679154