



Case Study - Coaching for Performance Improvement (CPI) for First Engineering Ltd

Overview

First Engineering Ltd (now Babcock Rail Ltd) identified that despite several attempts at corrective measures, its High Output IMT was continuing to experience a significant level of incidents associated directly with its need to work in Rule Book T3 possessions and Engineering Worksites. Analysis of recent incidents identified a clear pattern of contributory factors in which inappropriate behaviours and failure to communicate effectively were the most significant. Further analysis revealed that a High Output Engineering Supervisor (ES) will typically deal with roundly 100 safety critical-related incoming and outgoing calls per shift and roundly 25 safety critical 'face to face' communications. Taken together, an ES will typically impart or listen to some 400 individual pieces of critical information each shift excluding more general calls relating to resourcing or the progress of on-site operations.

This intensity of safety critical communication is comparable with that of a NR signaller but comparisons of associated training and development are much less favourable towards the ES. Discussions with groups of FEL ES confirmed their support for a 'step-change' in safety critical communication training but also identified the substantial advantages associated with an 'on-site' programme in which 'real world' challenges and behaviours could be fully taken into account.

Dealing with the Challenge

In order to deal effectively with the challenges outlined above, FEL decided to implement a pilot voice communication coaching programme for selected members of its High Output team in Doncaster. FEL selected Benchmark Training Ltd to design, develop and implement the pilot programme as a direct consequence of their high quality work on NR's SAF6 voice communications training programme.

The Pilot Programme

Benchmark Training Ltd was contracted to provide voice communication coaching to 12 selected members of the Doncaster High Output team during the pilot programme. Coaching was always carried out 'on-site' and each participant received a minimum of 17 hours individual coaching during the six week programme.

Prior to the on-site coaching, all participants received a joint FEL/Benchmark briefing on the programme and the High Output team also facilitated introductory visits to their work sites for the Benchmark coach. The coach had a 45 minute initial meeting with each of the participants and has also had an introductory meeting with their manager to learn as much as possible about the specific challenges faced by the team.

To meet their aim, Benchmark and FEL devised a programme in which, on average, three members of the High Output team was coached each night. Each participant worked with his coach about 6 times during the programme with each session typically lasting about 3 hrs.



The Planned Benefits

Coaching, by its nature, is a very confidential activity but it is also recognised to be the most effective method for bringing about sustainable changes in behaviour and attitude. It was our aim that by the end of the programme, all participants should effectively become 'the guardians' of safety related communications within the High Output team and this should be reflected in the feedback received from appropriate NR PICOPs and other individuals with whom the programme participants communicate professionally on a regular basis.

Measuring Success

To quantify progress, Benchmark and FEL devised a number of means by which we could capture and measure the impact that the programme had, not only on the participants, but also other personnel with whom they communicated on a professional basis during their 'campaigns'.

Impact and Benefits

The success of the coaching programme was rooted in two key points. Firstly, the participants genuinely wanted to make improvements in the quality of their voice communications because they recognised that it would positively impact upon their safety and efficiency. Secondly, and what actually became much more important to them, was that they very quickly realised just how bad their voice communications were and so were determined to not only make the substantial improvements required but were also prepared to do so at an accelerated pace. We are convinced that within the renewals/possessions business as a whole it is this factor that will be the true catalyst for a marked improvement in the quality of voice communications.

During the coaching, one of the greatest benefits of the programme was the knock-on effect to other work-site staff. A continual feedback theme from the participants was that PICOPs, RRV drivers, OTM operators and COSSs were genuinely trying to improve their voice communications to try and achieve the standards being set by the FEL ESs. This effect was not only brought about by the ESs 'policing' of the standard of voice communications within the sites but by the individual initiative of other staff. Our view is that the overall safety and efficiency of these work-sites probably increased exponentially during the programme as a result of the few having an 'oil-slick' impact on the many.

Achieving a sustainable change in behaviour was always the crux of the programme and it is why FEL decided upon coaching in preference to any other learning and development intervention. The positive feedback from the participants fully vindicated the decision. It also makes clear that a work-based, self-reflective and intensive coaching programme, supported by a strong positive group ethic, is able to create and sustain a positive change in behaviour that will have a significant and beneficial impact, not just on the participants, but also on the wider contingent of personnel that, collectively, make up the railway work-site. By all measures, the programme was judged a great success.



'The best course that I have ever attended in 17 years of service on the railway'.



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