

“Since Hunter Roberts helped us shift the focus from efforts to results we’ve been more consistently hitting our big quarterly financial goals.”

Alan Swiech

Senior VP (Human Resources), Chemtura

Chemtura improves performance

The Challenge

When global chemicals company Chemtura consistently missed its quarterly business results, it recognised the need to cascade responsibility for achieving overall financial targets down to individual employees...

Alan Swiech, senior VP (HR) at Chemtura, explains, “Once you go down a couple of layers of leadership, it gets difficult for people to see how their role contributes to the overall business plan. We wanted to give all our salaried employees, across 70 countries, a clearer line of sight between their activities and the overall performance of the business.”

He adds, “We also wanted to shift the focus from not just trying to deliver but actually delivering. The company was formed from a number of merged predecessor companies and when the global banking crisis and recession hit, it struggled financially. Despite having to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, we emerged a stronger company. There were always reasons to justify poor performance in the past but now we want to be much more forward looking and results oriented. This means doing much more to align individuals to the business plan and getting them to really commit to delivering their part.”

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The Approach

“Although we had a goal-setting and appraisal system in place, it was more of a box ticking activity with individuals and managers setting their own goals without direct regard to the overall

business commitments. Often, when we reviewed the individual sales targets, they didn't even add up to our overall revenue goal," says Alan.

"We had to shift the focus from just doing things, to doing the right things to drive results," says Elaine Bagley, director of Human Resources, "We were very impressed by the successful work Hunter Roberts was doing to drive performance with other global organisations, so we invited them to help improve our approach to goal-setting and performance management. After that, we also wanted them to train the HR function to deliver the new approach across the organisation – to create a high-performance culture."

The Solution

Hunter Roberts started by sharing best practice from other successful organisations and working with the top team to define 3-5 goals, which if they achieved would result in delivery of the business plan.

"We then worked with the next layer of management to help them translate the CEO's commitments into their own commitments," says Elaine. "Although the initiative was ultimately about managing performance we branded it Commitment & Results because we wanted people to commit, not just to taking action but actually delivering the results."

Next, Hunter Roberts held 2-3 day workshops across Europe, USA and Asia. Chemtura's entire HR community were trained to work with managers to cascade the General Manager's commitments for their part of the business into individual commitments for all 2,000+ professional and administrative workers.

"The training and coaching provided to the HR community was outstanding," says Alan. "The use of professional business actors in role plays was powerful and gave everyone the practice they needed to hold difficult conversations with people who were struggling with determining meaningful commitments or with those having difficulty delivering them."

Elaine adds, "Throughout the process, Hunter Roberts worked in partnership with us. They listen to our needs and tailor their approach to take into account the challenges and obstacles we face. This ensured our HR community properly understood what we were trying to achieve, so that they could then go out and train managers to complete the cascade."

The Results

"Since Hunter Roberts helped us shift the focus from efforts to results, we've been more consistently hitting our quarterly big financial goals we'd previously missed." says Alan. "Customer satisfaction has also jumped from 70% to nearly 90%, and the business has become better at focusing on things that matter."

“We now have a proper line of sight between the business goals and individual performance,” says Elaine. “Everybody knows what they have to deliver and that if Plan A doesn’t work out, they need to have a Plan B. It’s a real shift in how people think.”

Alan concludes: “It’s been a tough journey and there’s still a way to go, but the new approach helps improve accountability has actually improved engagement. People want to win and feel like they’ve had a hand in the winning. Better results mean many more people feel like they’ve made a positive contribution.”

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Director of Human Resources, Chemtura