



Harper Industries

Building Training Programs with Revenue Potential

“We are dedicated to the entrepreneurial spirit that creates unique and enduring opportunities for people to make a difference.”

Billy Harper
President
Harper Industries

Harper Industries, a Kentucky-based, construction-focused holding company with eight subsidiaries across three states and projects spread out all across America, knew that to effectively manage employee growth and development, it needed a centralized training function.

With an annual budget of just under \$50,000, Director of Talent Development Bill Mogan formed smart, strategic partnerships with local community colleges and universities to create state-of-the-art certification and employee training programs that in 2008 served more than 400 employees. He also implemented a new performance management system that focuses heavily on training and development opportunities with an impressive interactive Web-based curriculum.

■ Teaching the Trade

Harper Industries is committed to training throughout the organization — whether it is skills-based training or dealing with workforce readiness deficits and related training concerns.

The company believes, and studies show, that employees are more motivated to stay with a company that provides opportunities for professional growth and advancement. Mogan said the company’s philosophy for entry-level workers is to “hire employees we believe have a strong work ethic and good people skills ... then, we teach them the trade.”

It is a strategy that works, and other companies in similar fields may be able to learn from it.

■ Creating a Company University

Having established success in conducting orientation and safety skills classes taught by in-house, on-site experts and having implemented a triage-type performance management system that can identify and address training deficits and needs within the first 90 days of employment, Harper Industries knew it had to reach outside the company to create a more thorough training and development curriculum on “soft-skills” training for its employees.

“As for our future plans, we’re hoping to offer even more courses and be able to better target them to employees who will benefit the most from the training.”

Bill Mogan

Because it did not have the staff capacity or experience to do the training internally, the company joined forces with the four local community colleges and the University of Tennessee to create a customized curriculum for Harper employees. This program is called Harper University and is available to employees that have been recommended by their supervisor or department head.

Harper University offers classes ranging from finance, computer skills and management training classes to basic presentation skills and a Six Sigma training program. Mogan worked with the colleges to review their existing curriculum and customize it for their business focus.

These courses are taught on-site at the company, and instructors are sent to a designated

central location during work hours from September through May. Employees can earn college credit for these classes, and they are fully paid for by the company.

Nearly 90 percent of training is done during work time, for which the employee also is paid his or her salary or hourly rate. Currently, there are 23 instructor-led classes available, open to employees who are recommended by their supervisor and recognized for their leadership and communications skills.

In addition to the Harper University course offerings, the company created specialized Certificate Programs that consist of core competency courses within specific skill areas. The current Certificate Programs include:

- Basic/Advanced Supervisory Skills;
- Basic/Advanced Leadership Skills;
- Basic IT Skills; and
- Safety and Risk Management.

An employee can complete a Certificate Program within 18 months. The company plans to add Certificate Programs in specific functional areas, such as Finance and Accounting, Safety, Human Resources, Project Management, Administration, and others.

■ Jobs and Specific Skills Training

Recognizing that outside training schools and programs did not adequately prepare new hires for the higher standard of excellence at Harper Industries, the company

and its subsidiaries created several job and specific skills trainings:

- CDL Truck-Driving Training Program;
- FACTS: Frontier Advancement Career Training System;
- Internal Welding Academy; and
- Future Managers Program.

■ What's Next for Harper Industries?

Mogan believes the company is on target with its training and development and plans to add more targeted, focused functional training. Having seen great success in recruiting and retention since implementing the performance management and training programs, Mogan and the team at Harper Industries think they may have created a new revenue stream for the company. They are in the early planning stages of offering this customized curriculum to other companies in similar industries.

Ultimately, Mogan believes there are three key learnings from the Harper Industries experience:

- A holistic, integrated program linking performance evaluations to training and development is essential to both employee and company growth.
- Look externally for partnerships and solutions; handling everything in house is not always the way to go.
- Integrating training into an employee's career plan is essential to improved retention and loyalty.

About Corporate Voices for Working Families

Corporate Voices for Working Families is the leading national business membership organization representing the private sector on public and corporate policy issues involving working families. A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, we improve the lives of working families by developing and advancing innovative policies that reflect collaboration among the private sector, government and other stakeholders.

Find Out More

This case study is part of the comprehensive research report *The Ill-Prepared U.S. Workforce: Exploring the Challenges of Employer-Provided Workforce Readiness Training*. This research study and publications, other research studies and toolkits on a host of workforce readiness, flexibility, family economic stability, and work and family balance issues are available on the Corporate Voices Web site at www.corporatevoices.org.

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About Harper Industries

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Harper Industries is a holding company with eight construction- and infrastructure-industry subsidiaries. Headquartered in Paducah, KY, the company employs more than 800 and maintains subsidiary-located operations in three states, with projects across the United States and in Puerto Rico.