

March 2001

"A Commitment to Training" by Natalie Casp

For almost 18 years, Casmin, Inc., a component manufacturer member of WTCA, has been a part of central Florida's rapid expansion. In the last five years, the company has more than doubled its sales revenue. Casmin's expressed secret: High employee training standards.

Casmin has made a commitment to developing training centers around several employee safety training programs at the company's 44,000 square foot production center in Lady Lake, Florida. Quality becomes a natural result through the work of well-trained, safety-conscious employees.

President and CEO Mark Casp regards safety as a key issue in keeping the company successful.

"We consider safety the top priority on the production floor. We strive to have a safe workplace environment for our people; without that they cannot function efficiently and effectively," Casp said. "Next on our priority list is quality. Without a quality product, customers will go elsewhere. Our clients expect quality and we deliver."

"Our employee turnover has improved by about 50 percent, and we're targeting to cut it another 50 percent this coming year." —Gus Blair, Plant Manager

The company's training program covers all aspects of the technical specifications of their products, quality standards and standard operating procedures of all plant departments. At the end of the program, the employee will understand the logistics of safely producing the quality product in its entirety.

Casmin's training programs don't come without an expense. The company spends roughly \$200,000 per year on training related issues, Casp said. At least \$50,000 per year is spent specifically on safety training. In 2000, the company added a new 900 square foot training center to accommodate this training.

The facility is equipped for computer and video training in a classroom atmosphere. Throughout the week, a number of training sessions are held for production employees at the various stages in their career development. An in-depth training program greets every new employee while veteran employees are expected to revisit specific safety issues on a regular basis.

During their first 90 days with the company, employees enroll in a paid training program. The classes, which meet twice per week, focus on the technical aspects of using the equipment to safely create a quality product. At the end of the first 30 days, the employee meets privately with the human resources manager for a counseling session to discuss progress in both the classes and the workplace in general. Again at the 60-day mark, the human resources manager will meet with each new hire to see if they continue to progress in the training program. Upon successful completion of the 90-day training program, the employee receives a \$0.50/hour

increase in pay and his/her performance is reviewed. The paid training period adds an incentive to produce a quality product, according to Plant Manager Gus Blair.

“In the performance review, we look to see if the employee has excelled in the work environment. If so, they are eligible for an additional \$0.50/hour pay increase,” Blair said. “High performance and safety are rewarded.”

For all employees, Blair said that safety issues are addressed on a weekly basis. “It’s our training policy that at the beginning of each workweek, before doing any work, the supervisors have a ‘stand-up toolbox’ safety meeting for their department,” Blair said. “It gets the workers focused and mentally prepared for their specific tasks.”

To continually address potential kinks in the safety standards, Casmin implemented a program called “Safety from the Crew” two years ago. Employees are encouraged to point out potential safety hazards in the operating procedures. “We typically receive five or six safety tips per week. We publish them and act on them,” Blair said.

A monthly plant-wide meeting also contributes to the safe work environment that Casmin has built. “We bring in lunch for all the employees and discuss safety, production statistics, any changes in direction, changes in the standard operating procedures and policies as they pertain to the employees,” Blair said. “This keeps our workforce educated and comfortable within their working environment. Educated and informed employees are good employees.”

These training programs on safety, in turn, have created a healthy company. The retention rate of employees has gone up while the accident/injury rate has gone down each of the last three years. “Our employee turnover has improved by about 50 percent, and we’re targeting to cut it another 50 percent this coming year,” Blair said.

In addition to the various in-house training programs for plant personnel, staff employees have taken courses at the local community college on topics related to supervision, management and other business related topics, at company expense. Several members of upper-management in the production facility have begun taking Spanish classes in order to communicate more effectively with the Hispanic population working at Casmin. This has reduced communication tensions and provided a more comfortable and sensitive workplace.

On-site seminars from outside sources have also been conducted. Recently the 16 members of the design staff successfully completed the WTCA Truss Technician Training (TTT) Level I course at the training center. Maintaining an efficient and effective workplace stems from well-trained supervisors. In February, Casmin introduced a by-invitation-only, advanced training program that is designed to turn flourishing workers into supervisors.

Of all the issues Casmin, Inc. faces on a daily basis, training constantly remains a primary concern. Casp has learned that excellence in employee training translates to excellence in product and ultimately a successful company.

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