

Toys“R”Us Achieves Unity in Diversity—and a Dramatic Drop in Turnover

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Toys“R”Us management was concerned that discussing diversity could be uncomfortable for some employees. To establish a high level of comfort when discussing differences, management chose to begin their Workforce Diversity Program with one day of LIFO® Training. Ten years later, LIFO Training has gone beyond the successful, turnover-reducing diversity program to take an important part in the management development curriculum, and in training line managers to facilitate LIFO Training with store personnel. Lisa Walton, Director of Training in the Corporate Education Department, speaking about the Workforce Diversity Program, says, “Talking about differences in communication styles was non-threatening yet a great source of insight for people. It enabled our participants to open up and share with each other about their own styles and how their styles had helped or hindered them in the business setting.”

According to Walton, including LIFO Training in the Workforce Diversity Program has helped Toys“R”Us achieve a number of key program goals. She says that it helps participants identify behaviors they want to change and what will motivate them to change. She says, “It gives people the opportunity to maximize the best of what they have to offer.”

Human Resources Manager Lori Madden says that LIFO Training has helped management focus on the results people achieve, rather than how they get to those results. According to Madden, the turnover rate has greatly decreased to one of the lowest in the industry. She believes that this is in large part due to the company’s use of LIFO Training. “We are hiring better quality individuals who are running better quality stores. The awareness we’ve developed through LIFO Training has helped us become a much more balanced organization.”

“The culture of the company was very high in Controlling,” Walton adds. “LIFO Training has helped raise awareness of this fact and has helped us both to select and to retain a more diverse group of employees.”

Improving Management Performance

LIFO Training has been part of the Toys“R”Us management development curriculum for over ten years. It is now an integral part of the curriculum in all three divisions of the company—Toys“R”Us, Kids“R”Us, and Babies“R”Us. It is currently included in two main training programs:

- **Workforce Diversity Program**, a 3-day program for managers who have been with the company for at least one year.

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- **Supervisor Training Program**, a 10-day program for new store managers.

In 1998, Toys“R”Us added LIFO Training to its Supervisor Training Program for new store managers. “Starting new managers off with a better understanding of their communication styles enables them to communicate more effectively with both coworkers and customers,” Walton reports. “We believe that it makes them more successful earlier in their careers.”

Marina Benedico, Human Resources Assistant Manager, frequently facilitates the LIFO Training workshops. She says, “Participants rate the program very highly. They say that LIFO Training is one of the most positive experiences they get throughout the 10-day Supervisor Training Program.”

DungVo, Store Director in Miami, Florida, participated in LIFO Training several years ago. He says, “It has helped me to become more sensitive to the needs of both employees and customers. It’s important to see others’ points of view. LIFO Training has made me a better store director.”

Walton says that LIFO Training has helped the company in many ways. Perhaps the most dramatic is the way it has helped managers improve their one-on-one relationships with their supervisors and key subordinates. She says, “Understanding the LIFO behavioral styles can be very helpful in building those relationships.”

Recent participant Tammie Nieto, Assistant Store Director in Orlando, Florida, says “What I liked was that I got to see how I was perceived by others. I also liked that it opened up the eyes of my coworkers to how they are perceived. I look at people differently now, because I know they don’t necessarily see things the same way I do.”

Managers as Facilitators

Toys“R”Us is committed to introducing LIFO Training throughout the organization. Delivering it economically to store personnel has been the challenge. To solve this problem, Toys“R”Us worked closely with David Glowatzke, Senior Master Trainer for Stuart Atkins, Inc., to develop a program that trains carefully selected line managers and store directors to facilitate LIFO Training workshops.

This new initiative has been very well received. One key to its success has been selecting line managers and store directors who already have good presentation skills, understand the LIFO concepts, and utilize the LIFO strategies in dealing with others. Another important factor has been partnering the managers and directors with trainers from the Human Resources Department. Only after a successful period of mentoring do the line managers and store directors lead LIFO training sessions on their own.

This delivery method has had important side benefits. Walton says, “If you only have Human Resources people conducting the training, it is viewed as a Human Resources program. But when your District Manager is facilitating the session, it takes on a different level of meaning. It really does become the way that business has to be done. As a result, we are able to deliver a program that has a great deal of impact.”

“It’s been exciting to work with an expansive, fast paced organization like Toys“R”Us, says Eric Dahl, Vice President of Design and Development for Stuart Atkins, Inc. “The Toys“R”Us Corporate Education Department took our basic LIFO training applications and delivered them the way they were designed, yet they skillfully tailored them to the specific needs and goals of their organization.”

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Dr. Stuart Atkins, principal author of the Life Orientations® Survey and originator of LIFO® Training, says that Toys“R”Us has impacted the growth and development of two generations of children in his family. “I’m delighted to reciprocate to the Toys“R”Us family,” Dr. Atkins states, “and I’m pleased to know we have contributed to the growth of many people in the organization—and that the company is the beneficiary of the growth. Toys“R”Us not only found unity in their diversity but improved performance along with it.” 