



Monthly meetings are a good way for companies to exchange information with employees. (Photo courtesy of Valley Chrome Plating, Inc.)

Human Resources are Priority Issues For Finishing Shops of All Sizes

Human resources (HR) is not a typical topic at surface finishing conferences, but if you ask any successful metal finishing company, it will tell you that HR is a high priority. Companies may differ in the way they handle HR, but all place major emphasis on obtaining and retaining dependable people to fill the various positions available in a plating job shop.

A Large Company Approach

Valley Chrome Plating, Inc., Clovis, CA, is a relatively large metal finishing company that employs a team of 70 full-time people and 30 temporary workers. Two human resource specialists work for the company to manage the personnel policy and benefit programs.

Ray Lucas of Valley Chrome says that the largest challenge for the company has been recruiting reliable workers who meet the company's strict attendance policy and zero tolerance drug policy. "We have attended job fairs sponsored by the local Employment Development Department in an attempt to match their unemployed with our open positions. We have taken out advertisements in local publications. We also submit job postings with a local junior college, which has shown some success," Lucas said. The method that has proven most successful, however, has been using tempo-

rary agencies. "Relying on two temporary services to handle our job openings enables us to focus more on our training and benefits programs," he said.

Once a temporary worker has met the 60 to 90-day period provided by the temporary service, he or she is eligible to apply for a position with Valley Chrome. After applicants have passed a drug test and background check, they are eligible for employment.

Within 30 days of being hired, new employees receive safety training, which includes "lock-out tag-out," and MSDS training. Continuous training is provided each month on several levels throughout the company. Monthly meetings, for example, are held each month for all employees. These meetings enable management to communicate with employees and convey information such as current production goals, discuss reject rates, deliver company news, provide employee recognition, or discuss problem areas. Guest speakers are also invited on a regular basis to speak on a range of topics from proper lifting, to how to plan a home budget, to the hazards of drug abuse.

Monthly department "tailgates" are also held so that department supervisors can communicate with their teams. Topics for these meetings may include more safety training, production and reject goals or spe-

cific policy issues. The "tailgates" also provide employees a forum for asking questions and to offer suggestions. Typically, the tailgates are held without management in attendance so that employees can speak candidly with their supervisor. The supervisor has discretion to bring any appropriate information or issues to the attention of management.

Valley Chrome also has an open door policy that helps to keep communication flowing between employees and management, Lucas said. "Employees are welcome to discuss ideas or concerns at anytime with their manager," he said. "If employees are too shy or embarrassed to voice a concern, they are encouraged to use the suggestion box."

Every suggestion received is discussed publicly each month at the plant meeting. Concerns from the past have ranged from cost of living pay, to training sessions, to anonymous information about policy violations. The suggestion box has worked well for the company in the past.

Valley Chrome's incentive program incorporates the attendance policy with a method for employees to gain rewards, according to Lucas. Daily plant walk-throughs are performed several times during the work day. Items such as cleanliness, safety, tardiness and attendance are noted and recorded. Employees with the

highest scores are eligible for "employee of the month."

Each person accumulates daily points that can be turned in monthly for rewards, such as movie passes, coffee mugs, water bottles, or tee shirts. Points can also be stored up to gain a larger incentive, such as a day at a water park, boardwalk, or amusement park. The "employee of the year" gains a day off with pay, a paid weekend at the beach, and some spending money.

Lucas said the incentive program is in addition to health and dental benefits and the 401(k) program. Valley Chrome pays 90 percent of the health and dental costs for each employee. The company also offers a 401(k) retirement program to each employee after one year of employment. Lucas said 95 percent of the employees participate in the 401(k) program.

Through the years, Valley Chrome has learned that communicating with employees regularly is the best method for resolving issues before they escalate. "By sharing the good news about customers and projects gives everyone a sense of teamwork and unity," said Lucas said. "Explaining our policies, holding employees accountable to these policies, and a reward system for

adherence, act as a three-pronged approach to success in our plant," he noted.

A Mid-Sized Company Approach

Thirty years ago, Roll Technology of Greenville, SC, started out with three employees. Today, the company has 40 people working, and has grown to a 5,000 ft² production facility.

At Roll Technology, the office manager handles human resources, with the help of the company executive vice president and the company's attorney.

Cindy Akers is the officer manager. She said that Roll Technology recruits workers from local trade and vocational schools, along with local career assistance centers. Another area being considered, she reported, is an industry-focused employment service.

Akers said that the major issues involved with getting and retaining good employees is good benefits, good wages and good working conditions. Continuous training is also a major part of the program. The company sponsors regular seminars and educational sessions, and uses supplier-sponsored sessions as part of the on-

going training. "We have an internal safety program in place that is based on "Train the Trainer," Akers said. Along with training from suppliers, outside sources such as DHEC and OSHA are routinely involved in company training programs.

Roll Technology offers an incentive-based year end bonus program that is based on overall company performance. Akers said that some of the items considered include cost reduction, waste elimination, system improvements, and value added performance.

Other benefits include health insurance, dental insurance, company paid LTD, Life and AD&D, along with uniforms and subsidized safety shoes. The health insurance, Akers pointed out, also includes home nursing care services for covered employees and their eligible dependents.

Akers said that it is very important for a company to have one point of contact for all human resource issues. "Have clear cut guidelines documented so there is no confusion when legally sensitive issues arise," she said. "Human resource laws are constantly changing. Keeping up-to-date is a crucial part of the job." P&SF



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