

CASE STUDY: FACILITATED STRATEGIC PLANNING LEADS TO SAFETY PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENTS AT THE UNITED ILLUMINATING COMPANY

Written By Dorothea Brennan, Senior Project Manager

Safety Strategic Planning with Union Results in 79% Reduction in Frequency of Motor Vehicle Accidents and Other Improvements

Awarded the prestigious Platinum Impact Award – the highest level awarded by the International Association of Facilitators, The United Illuminating Company (partner of Leadership Strategies) was recognized for significant results reached through the integration of facilitation and collaboration in strategic planning. The Safety Strategic Planning was developed through a series of facilitated sessions with UI and its union, the Utility Workers of America Local 470-1, to measurably improve UI's safety performance. Improvement in key metrics included: 44% reduction in Lost Time Accidents, 43% reduction in At Fault Motor Vehicle Accidents, 54% reduction in the frequency of Lost Time Accidents based on hours worked, and 79% reduction in the frequency of Motor Vehicle Accidents based on the miles driven.



BACKGROUND

UIL Holdings Inc. values state:

We Believe:

- Safety comes first
- Integrity, honesty and collaboration are our foundation
- Continuous improvement builds excellence
- Sustainable solutions add value

Our vision states:

“We are recognized by our stakeholders as a utility-industry leader, focused on the customer and engaged in deploying environmentally sustainable solutions that provide electric utility services safely, reliably and at reasonable cost.”

This is carried through with Safety as one of The United Illuminating Company's (UI) most important goals on our Corporate Balanced Scorecard.

At the time this facilitation started, UI, an electric transmission and distribution utility was UIL Holdings Inc.'s primary operating company. In spite of years of work by the Central Safety Committee, management and the union, including a number of initiatives and training efforts, UI was still not performing in the top quartile of New England utilities on safety metrics.

Given UI's commitment to safety, management was determined to create a safer environment for our employees, customers, communities and contractors. The results of the facilitation have led to significant improvements in UI's safety record in the last three years, particularly in 2012. These improvements included 79% decline in the frequency rate of lost time accidents. In 2010, UIL Holdings Inc. acquired

3 gas distribution utilities and this effort was immediately expanded to include them.

In late 2009, Diane Pivrotto, the head of Human Resources, asked Dorothea Brennan, then the Director of Process Improvement, to facilitate the development of a safety strategic plan through joint sessions between management and members of UI's union, the Utility Workers of America Local 470-1.

“44% REDUCTION IN LOST TIME ACCIDENTS, 43% REDUCTION IN AT FAULT MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS, 54% REDUCTION IN THE FREQUENCY OF LOST TIME ACCIDENTS, AND 79% REDUCTION IN THE FREQUENCY OF MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS”

Dorothea commented, “From my perspective, I loved the opportunity to work on a collaboration between management and union and, thus, employees from across the company.” Likewise, both the President of the Utility Workers of America Local 470-1, Moses Ram, and Manager of Safety and Technical Training, Walter Booker, commented, “Dorothea’s facilitation style during the joint union and management meeting was very effective. This helped to reinforce and sustain our joint Labor and Management Partnership.” The entire effort was based on facilitated sessions that continued through February 2011. Approximately seven years earlier, there had been a strike, and at the start of this process, all parties were still repairing working relationships.

Part of the complexity of this effort was that it required facilitating three separate groups through different aspects of the process, in tandem. They were:

1. The UI Management Sessions included the

Vice President Human Resources, Director Labor Relations, Manager Safety and Technical Training, and Vice President and Directors of operations groups. The purpose of these sessions was to get group agreement on an approach to use in the other sessions, agree on priorities and roles and to brief the facilitator on issues and personal relationships that might impact the larger facilitated sessions.

2. The Joint Leadership Sessions included UI Management and leadership of the union including the President, Vice President, Stewards and other officers of the Utility Workers of America Local 470-1. The purpose of these sessions was to agree on the overarching goal of the effort (to develop a strategic action plan), the approach to be used, the personnel to be included, roles in the session, the agenda, and the facilitation techniques to be used. It was also to discuss the issues and personal relationships that might impact the facilitated sessions.
3. The Safety Strategic Planning Group included all of those from the Joint Leadership sessions and management and union personnel from every business area in the company. The purpose of these sessions was to facilitate the group through a series of conversations and exercises to create an action plan that would measurably improve UI’s safety record.

In addition, there were one-to-one sessions with the Vice President Human Resources, Director Labor Relations and Manager Safety and Technical Training. The typical sequence was a one-to-one meeting, followed by a Management session, followed by Joint Leadership session(s) and then the full Safety Strategic Planning Group. The reverse sequence of meetings took place as part of debriefing from a session. At the end of each session, the entire group was asked for feedback on the facilitation: what worked, what didn’t and what needs to be changed for next time. Privately, the Management and Joint Leadership groups were asked for feedback on the Safety Strategic Planning sessions.

Out of the facilitated sessions grew another phase. The Safety Strategic Planning Group recommended

similar sessions be held by each business area in the company.

OUTCOMES

Tangible benefits included improvement in UI's safety performance over several years, as demonstrated by its reduction in lost time and motor vehicle accidents. The project started too late in 2009 to influence 2010 outcomes. Since then, there has been a significant improvement in both total numbers and frequency, including a 78.9% reduction in the frequency of lost time accidents.

Facilitation was the core of this entire process and integral to its success. The facilitation led to joint discovery of the underlying issues, development of an action plan (Safety Strategic Plan), and commitment and ownership of the plan by those involved in the sessions and ultimately throughout the company.

“A CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTOR WAS FOR THE FACILITATED SESSIONS TO CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR UNION AND MANAGEMENT TO RAISE AND DISCUSS KEY ISSUES”

A critical success factor was for the facilitated sessions to create a safe environment for union and management to raise and discuss key issues that were limiting improvement in UI's safety performance. Once discussed, through the facilitated sessions, they worked together to prioritize the issues, develop action plans and then established clear responsibility for follow-through on implementation.

In terms of building a collaborative culture:

- Historically, UI has a long history of using cross-functional teams to implement projects such as new systems, construction of critical components of its electric system, and fostering cultural change (e.g. embracing diversity in its culture).

In 2003, Dorothea introduced an approach known as After Action Review (AAR). The AAR is modeled on the US Army's methodology. The goal was to expand our culture of collaboration and create a learning environment that embraced continuous improvement. That first session included the entire project team (50+) from a high visibility project that had not achieved all that was desired. The team included employees from all levels within the organization (CEO to analyst). The success of the session led to wide-spread sustained use of formally facilitated AAR's throughout the organization.

BEST PRACTICES

Dorothea shared insights on best practices used: “We wanted a reasonably large group of participants, so I used table seating assignments to mix the groups and then had much of the work done in table-top exercises. The participants then asked that we roll the model out to the whole company! To do this, we created a facilitation toolkit and offered facilitation support to each of the divisions. We believe this wide-spread participation was an important driver of the results achieved.”

Other best practices used for this facilitated effort included techniques adopted from Leadership Strategies' facilitation methodology:

- The use of an independent facilitator to plan, organize and run the sessions. This approach was ideally suited to the overall objectives of the company and the union in achieving an improved safety record because of the size and diversity of the group. In addition the participants had different roles in the company that could give rise to conflict such as management and union leadership, field and office personnel, etc.
- The use of the Management group and the Joint Leadership group provided for solid pre-planning designed to draw out the best in each individual and the group as a whole. We needed to address conflicting agendas (management and bargaining unit, office and field etc.), ensure representation of the different cultures within the company, work to build teams, model positive professional attitudes, and build trust and credibility. Some of the tactics used to address these and

other aspects of the facilitation included:

- o Ensure the participants represented the entire workforce and included those who were known to challenge management and potentially be outspoken.
- o Build relationships and ensure everyone's "voice" was heard. We needed to include quite a number of people, but we also wanted this to be a personal experience. We did not want people to be present but opt to sit on the sidelines. Our solution was to work in table groups of six to eight. Maintaining the seating arrangements across multiple strategy sessions helped to build the team dynamic and ensure continuity. The various facilitation techniques used then provided opportunities for the table groups to mix and share information.
- o Use session design and physical structure to create an environment for success. We developed a seating arrangement to mix the group, to avoid known interpersonal conflicts and ensure a balance of attitudes at each table. We assigned a table facilitator who was prepared to help manage the exercises and intervene if misaligned behavior threatened to disrupt the work (which never happened).
- o Use of a formal invitation including the proposed agenda with clearly defined objectives, ground rules and a list of participants helped to clarify purpose and emphasize the importance of the effort. The introduction of proposed ground rules and adoption by the entire group gained buy-in and provided the facilitator with a tool to help the group achieve their desired outcomes.
- o A pre-arranged visit to the strategic session by the Chief Operating Officer and participation by other senior executives emphasized management's support of this effort and its overall importance.
- o Use of a trained facilitator and formal facilitation techniques helped design an approach and structure to foster success. This also meant that, if needed, the facilitator was skilled enough to adapt on the fly to any situation that might arise. On several occasions, the facilitator successfully intervened to get buy-in from an individual or group to ensure the group achieved its objectives.
- o Use of multiple brainstorming and facilitation techniques helped to draw the best out of participants and give everyone a voice. These techniques included silent, individual brainstorming with Post-its, group Post-it exercises, dot voting (nominal) to prioritize, group brainstorming using flip charts, and reporting out by each table group with the opportunity for other participants to add to the information. Ensuring group memory by using the participants' own words to document their thoughts, sharing a draft of the session documentation and ensuring everyone understood that executive management would be given ALL of their feedback helped to build trust and improve communications.

Collectively, these best practices helped to ensure that all of the participants were engaged and had confidence that their input would be used to map the next steps in UI's efforts to improve safety.

With its 1000+ employees, UI provides for the transmission and delivery of electricity and other energy related services for Connecticut's Greater New Haven and Bridgeport areas serving over 325,000 customers in 17 communities. To learn more, please visit www.uinet.com.

Contact: Dorothea Brennan, Senior Project Manager



Sharing the power of facilitation with the world.

Connect with us.

leadstrat.com

800.824.2850



Leadership Strategies, Inc. is the U.S. leader in meeting facilitation services, having trained over 18,000 individuals in facilitation skills over twenty years. We provide professional meeting facilitation services for areas such as strategic planning, issue resolution, team building, and other group sessions. We also offer expert training services that help individuals strengthen their soft skills through facilitation.

TAKE A FACILITATIVE APPROACH