

## Skills Highway Award Highly Commended: API Consumer Brands



Video Link <https://vimeo.com/177135384/cc308a3964>

A workplace literacy and numeracy programme has inspired staff at a South Auckland-based manufacturing company to speak up and make suggestions that are saving the business time and money.

API Consumer Brands is a wholly-owned subsidiary of API (Australian Pharmaceutical Industries) with two production facilities - a pharmaceutical plant and a toiletries plant - based in Manukau. The company employs 220 people in New Zealand.

To maintain global competitiveness and to secure the future of the business, API recognised that it needed to improve the way it operates and builds workforce capability and confidence, enabling employees to grow and develop, ultimately contributing more to the company's bottom line.

Feedback from employee surveys highlighted that employees wanted to learn more and be more included in decision-making.

But it was clear there was a link between the literacy and numeracy difficulties that staff faced and the organisational challenges the business needed to address.

API's staff comes from diverse cultural backgrounds and many don't have English as a first language. Some struggle to understand the importance of following Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) or correctly completing documentation, which is vital in the highly regulated and procedure-focused Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) pharmaceutical

environment. There were also instances of staff not understanding verbal instructions or speaking up at team meetings.

In June 2015 API partnered with The Learning Wave to develop a five-day embedded literacy and numeracy-based programme called "OneAPI: Enrich, inspire, grow", designed to increase employees' skills and send a strong message that everyone has an important part to play in making API successful.

The first step in implementing the initiative was analysing learning and workplace literacy needs to ensure the programme would be relevant and tailored to API's business needs and workforce challenges. This involved site tours, interviews with managers and understanding the roles and responsibilities of employees.

Literacy needs were then linked with API's desired outcomes which included better understanding of health and safety policies, GMP, quality and productivity, increased confidence in speaking up, asking questions, and following SOP's, using initiative, accepting change and increased communication, teamwork and improved cultural diversity.

The OneAPI programme was designed as a 40 hour programme and, to meet shift rosters and enhance learning, it was delivered in 10 four-hour modules. Eight employees were selected to attend the pilot programme from August to November 2015 and, following the resounding success of the pilot, API committed to rolling out OneAPI across all 80 of its production employees.

Managers were encouraged to be involved as much as possible in the programme, including attending sessions, and API's General Manager Mitch Cuevas delivers a 30-minute presentation on the company's strategy as part of the programme.

Learners and managers have one-on-one discussions after each module and a graduation session, held on the final day, enables managers and senior management to celebrate the learners' successes and to reinforce their support in keeping the learning alive.

After listening to presentations from the OneAPI participants, one manager commented that his eyes had been opened to the capabilities of his team.

"This programme has already had a significant positive impact on the business," says HR manager Sara Hall. "Employees are happier, more motivated and energised. There is much less of a 'them and us' feel and more of a 'We are all OneAPI' feel."

Other noticeable benefits have been increased ownership, teamwork and personal accountability, improved communication including speaking up and asking questions and a deeper understanding and focus on health and safety and SOPs.

There has been a significant reduction in documentation errors, improvements in staff attendance and more suggestions for continuous improvement from employees, resulting in increased efficiencies and cost savings.

These include batch numbers and barcodes being added to labels so that only one label, not two, is needed on bottle shippers, halving the time to label the shippers, and installing a warning light or bell to indicate when the 1500L tank is running low, to stop the product overheating or becoming aerated, resulting in a lot of re-checking and wastage of product.

Pre and post-programme evaluations of learners show improvements in reading, numeracy, writing and speaking and listening skills.

Participants are also asked to complete a self-evaluation of what they have gained from the programme which indicated a 35% increase in understanding why health and safety is so important, a 36% increase in asking questions, a 32% increase in completing paperwork and a 33% increase in speaking up.

Feedback on the programme shows the learnings have helped employees at work and at home, improving their communication styles and helping with personal relationships.

"This training programme has helped me a lot with my communication. I have also learned how to explain things more clearly and all about health and safety - that everybody is responsible for their own safety - speak up, check your work and care and respect one another."

"I really benefitted from this programme. It taught me skills and tools I can use to excel in my job, as well as at home."

"This is not an end, it is just a beginning."