

Skills Highway Award: Coca-Cola Amatil New Zealand



Coca-Cola Amatil New Zealand's Auckland Manufacturing Manager Fatu Pataolo was so sure raising the literacy and numeracy levels of his team would benefit the company and the staff, he badgered his manager until he got approval to run a learning project during work hours.

Fatu says he wanted to give his team skills that would have a positive effect on their work and personal lives so they could be "one team, rather than them and us".

Coca-Cola Amatil New Zealand (CCANZ) is the licensed bottler of The Coca-Cola Company in New Zealand. It is a local manufacturer with production facilities located in Auckland, Putaruru and Christchurch employing more than 900 people.

Its manufacturing/production team is a largely migrant force, with many having English as a second language. The company partnered with Aspire2 Business to create a programme that would improve these employees' core communication skills, including literacy, numeracy, language, problem solving and critical thinking.

Team members were given the opportunity to enrol in the programme in May 2016 and 20 employees participated, undertaking 22 two-hour sessions across a five-month period.

Fatu took on leadership of the programme in addition to his management position, and the company agreed to allow employees to complete the programme during work time, investing 880 labour hours of paid time. Fatu told participants that if productivity fell behind they would need to come in at the weekend to make up the shortfall. Fortunately, he never had to do this over the five months of the programme. He credits this to greater levels of engagement amongst the team.

National Manufacturing Manager Tony Forrest, who is Fatu's manager says, Fatu was very persistent in asking for the programme, and insisting the classes happen in company time.

Participants were invited to a graduation in October 2016 which involved a final presentation to approximately 80 of their peers and management team. The final presentation was also attended by members from the Senior Leadership team including Tony Forrest and John Truscott (General Manager Supply Chain).

Forrest says the programme has changed the culture through improved communication. "Employees are not reluctant to speak up now and so we are getting more valuable input into the day-to-day running of the plant."

Assessment before and after the programme showed improvements in levels of reading, oral communication, writing and numeracy for all learners in the programme, and it's had other measurable and observable benefits.

The plant has enjoyed a steady decrease in performance and disciplinary action due to a better understanding of work processes. In 2014 there were a number of investigations around errors in the manufacturing process. Fatu believes this was due to poor comprehension of written and verbal instructions. There were none in 2016.

As of April 2017 there were 216 per cent more near misses reported than year-to-date in 2016. Coca-Cola Amatil credit this to improvements in reading and writing skills - employees can now better understand company documentation, including health and safety information, and are comfortable using the relevant forms, completing documentation to a higher standard.

It also reports that employees are now completing numeracy tasks more accurately and efficiently, and are also better able to manage their pay through increased understanding of their payslips and how to budget their income.

Since the programme there has been an increase in engagement for Fatu's team from 75 per cent in 2015 to 90 per cent in 2016. This is eight points higher than the company score of 82 per cent.

Course participants have given feedback that they have grown in confidence, communicate with team members better, have a better understanding of health and safety processes, including filling in forms, and have learned how to speak in a group.

Many report sharing what they have learned at home, and having better communication with their children and partners.

"Everything in this programme has made me proud of myself. It has opened up new avenues to explore," says one.

The programme has now become an ongoing component of the training and development calendar in the wider supply chain at CCANZ.

