

Skills Highway Award Entrant:

B&D Doors NZ

Video Link: <https://vimeo.com/141146571>

When one doors closes... B&D Doors NZ Ltd is a leader in residential and industrial garage door manufacturing and service delivery in New Zealand. The organisation has plants in both islands of New Zealand as well as Australia and China.

Due to damage caused by the February 2011 earthquakes, the B&D Doors plant in Christchurch had to relocate to a building a lot smaller than the previous premises; this relocation brought about several changes to the business and the way they valued staff development.

A significant change was the organisation's new focus on 'Lean Manufacturing', the principal of reducing waste within the manufacturing process in order to add value to the consumer. For this move towards Lean Manufacturing to be successful B&D recognised the need to upskill their existing staff, something which hadn't previously been a priority. This was compounded by the fact that the organisation was keen to retain its workforce in the aftermath of the earthquakes, valuing the experience of these workers and the contributions they could make to the future of the organisation.

The decision to upskill staff was not simply a business necessity, it was also focused on the wellbeing of B&D employees. The aftermath of the earthquakes was often a difficult time for staff personally, as well as professionally. Investing in the formal education and development of the manufacturing team gave people something to focus on and motivate them at a time when morale was low and personal lives were often difficult.

The average age of the manufacturing team was 46 and most had left school at a young age with little or no formal qualifications. Working with Hagley Adult Literacy Centre, B&D Doors provided individuals with the opportunity to improve their literacy and numeracy skills through acquiring a formal qualification. This was as much about providing a development pathway to people who may never been exposed to this kind of opportunity before, as it was a way to acknowledge a traumatic time for employees from Christchurch and give them a positive focus.

For the first year of the two year course, staff took part in the Literacy and Numeracy course provided by the Hagley Centre, which provided one-on one tutoring every week and was particularly helpful for those whose first language is not English. In the second year, students moved on to work related modules such as health and safety at work, manufacturing processes and cost implications, and some even elected to take further modules to increase the level of qualification they gained.

By September 2014, all 23 staff members had earned their National Certificate of Core Skills in Manufacturing. Eleven of these also earned a Certificate of Competitive Manufacturing at Level 2. One staff member even went on to earn their Assessors Certificate.

Gaining these qualifications has resulted in a reduction of staff turnover and more engaged employees with the confidence to own the improvements in their work area. There is a discernible pride in working for B&D Doors and overall morale has increased. Staff working with a higher skill base has created a safer and happier, more productive workplace.

Paul Dryden, the New Zealand Operations Manager, recognises that the achievements of the team have not just translated into benefits within the workplace.

“There has been a significant improvement in employee confidence with them now having the skills to use both in and outside work,” says Paul. “As a result of participating in the training programme some employees have had the courage to gain a drivers licence, the confidence to leave the family home and go flatting, or even to purchase their own home”.

B&D Doors NZ wanted employees to see a future for themselves within the company, no matter what their age, ethnicity or previous education. The upskilling of workers in the area of lean manufacturing allowed them to have creative input into the layouts of the production areas at the new site, participating fully in the company’s new start after the earthquakes.

Furthermore, many have gained their first nationally recognised qualification and are now eligible for internal promotions, and can confidently identify and provide solutions for positive changes in their work areas.

Thanks to the success of this cohort, as well as high demand from staff, B&D will be continuing to support the two-year course for new recruits and other interested staff in 2015. Externally, B&D Doors is recognised as a leader in educating their people, and other companies have now followed the same blue print. A pilot scheme working with three high schools and 16 Canterbury manufacturers started in April 2015.