



Improving employee relations at Parcelforce

“We’re seeing much more reasoned responses to issues and people are approaching relationship challenges in a different way. People are a lot calmer.”



Parcelforce Worldwide is part of Royal Mail Group Ltd, a former public sector organisation that has had its fair share of industrial disputes and internal conflict in the past. As Sharon Sherriff, Head of ER/IR, Commercial and Professional functions, puts it,

“We come from a highly unionised environment and often things can seem like a battle.”

In recent years, though, there has been an enormous change in industrial relations within both Royal Mail and Parcelforce. At Parcelforce, TCM has been involved in training key employees as the company grew its mediation and conflict resolution framework known as Table of Success. The Table of Success process was established in 2008 and was designed to change the culture by engaging everyone in a mutual interest, success-driven agenda.

Parcelforce has introduced tailored mediation training to enhance positive relationships and behaviours and TCM has designed a training package to embed the Table of Success philosophy through training of managers and union representatives.

The training is aimed at building and maintaining strong relationships within Parcelforce and elevates mediation training to a key component in culture building and conflict awareness.

Communication Workers Union National Officer Terry Pullinger says,

“Parcelforce has grasped the opportunity to implement unique mediation and conflict resolution skills designed by TCM into the Table of Success approach. The Table of

Success approach and the philosophy of TCM have collided into a perfect fit and our ongoing work is developing a genuine mutual-interest blue print culture for any business.”

Sharon Sherriff says that in the early days there were plenty of doubts about the new training approach:

“There was lots of scepticism from people going in to it. People who had been here a long time weren’t sure what new skills they could be taught. But coming out of it they all said that they’d got something out of it.”

By ensuring mutually supported change, the Table of Success framework is bringing about a profound cultural evolution within the organisation, and Sharon Sherriff says people’s behaviours have started to change:

“We found that people could really relate to the principle of mediation and see how it changed the way you approached things, how you consider the other party’s point of view.”

“Subtle differences in our approach can make a huge, huge difference.”

Parcelforce’s ER/IR lead HR chief says it has had the impact of making all sides more confident in being open during potentially difficult discussions by lifting the fear of a grievance procedure.

And she says that some of those most sceptical going into the process have become its biggest advocates, wanting to know when further mediation training will be available elsewhere in the organisation:

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“People are telling us that they’ve found it quite enlightening. Everybody is coming back with the same kind of feedback. Everybody has found that they got something from it.”

The Table of Success principles were agreed between the CWU and Parcelforce to strengthen strategic partnerships within the organisation. It recognised the development of consensus and the sharing of ideas was vital for the organisation’s ability to meet its challenges and maximise success. The specifically developed mediation principles aim to give people within the organisation the tools to behave the way the Table of Success encourages.

Sharon Sheriff says that one of the most noticeable changes is a new willingness amongst people to talk without having a set solution in mind at the outset:

“It’s about looking at things in a really different way and

then to approach it in a different way. Subtle differences can make a huge, huge difference. Just the ability to have a discussion without feeling the need to have an answer and allow the discussion to generate the answer is, I think it’s quite an enlightened approach.”

Terry Pullinger says that the new skills benefit people in all aspects of their lives,

“One of the most compelling aspects of the training is that it is not only consistent with our evolving culture in Parcelforce, but it also has the potential to broaden people’s horizons and behaviours both in and outside the workplace.”

If you would like more information on how your organisation can benefit from mediation and negotiation skills training, call today and speak to a member of the team.