Reducing Turnover with Crucial Accountability and Crucial Conversations at Rocky Mountain Equipment

INDUSTRY: Retail

About Rocky Mountain Equipment: Rocky Mountain Equipment is the largest independent dealer of Case IH and Case Construction equipment in Canada, and the second largest in the world. RME’s goal is to bring professional, stable, and dependable equipment partnerships to its customers.

THE CHALLENGE

Rocky Mountain Equipment’s (RME) business model is reminiscent of a car dealership, except that the company sells heavy equipment for the construction and agricultural industries. RME operates more than 35 dealerships across Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, with more than 850 employees. The company has a unique leadership structure in that the three main discipline managers are responsible for the overall success of their respective branches. Each manager is required to handle all employee matters and customer concerns in their area of expertise and they were once very authoritarian in how they handled performance issues. Think “my way or the highway.” As a result, departments were at odds and communication suffered.

This disconnect led to higher than expected employee turnover. In 2015, RME was experiencing turnover rates of 30 percent or higher in some areas, which adversely impacted recruiting costs and overall efficiencies throughout the company. Exit interviews revealed that management was not skilled in communicating with employees, especially when it involved performance issues.

“The typical practice throughout the organization was to rule with an iron fist,” said Alex Andrews, Manager of Organizational Development for RME. “That management style was how things got done. It was built into the culture of the company and it needed to change.”

THE SOLUTION

To help solve this challenge, RME’s leadership team pinpointed gaps in handling performance issues as a leading cause to its high turnover rate. Given that knowledge, the team decided to focus on three key areas to eliminate those gaps in performance: 1. Effective leadership training; 2. Better communication;
We were dealing with opposing opinions and most of the conversations were high stakes, so we were dealing with really strong emotions," Andrews said. "The biggest thing for us was providing individuals the tools to address the emotional side of the conversation. My thinking was this: any training organization can give you a step-by-step process on how to collaborate and come up with shared goals and address high stakes issues. What's unique about Crucial Accountability and Crucial Conversations is they teach you the skills for actually having these conversations and managing the emotions of a situation. That was the driving factor when it came to deciding what training to use."

Crucial Accountability is a two-day course that teaches a step-by-step process to enhance accountability, improve performance, and ensure execution. It teaches skills for holding anyone accountable, mastering performance discussions, and motivating others without using power. Crucial Conversations Training teaches skills for communicating when the stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong. Participants learn to improve dialogue and engagement, develop skills to create changes in behavior, and build a high-performing culture of trust and respect.

RME rolled out Crucial Accountability to the company's management team, about 165 people total. Six months later, the team then received Crucial Conversations Training.

Crucial Accountability’s strength, according to Andrews, was that it provided a systematic way to help RME leadership identify gaps between what they expected their employees to do and their actual performance.

"The best way to address performance issues is to learn conversation skills to identify and address the gaps," Andrews said.

Once these gaps were identified, RME turned to Crucial Conversations to develop the skills for addressing these gaps respectfully. The biggest takeaway for RME’s leaders was learning how to make conversations safe for everyone and realizing this skill could lead to open, honest conversations.

"The biggest ah-ha moment was when our leaders began taking the time to reflect on the situation and realize they may not always be right," Andrews said. "They started exploring ways to get their employees to share their side of the story and open up."

**THE RESULTS**

Implementing Crucial Accountability and Crucial Conversations made an immediate impact at RME. The training proved to be so effective that Andrews and his team plan to roll it out to all employees. In addition, RME is committed to offering Influencer Training to the leadership team.

Even though RME didn’t have a systematic way to measure training results in its initial year, evidence reveals Crucial Conversations and Crucial Accountability have made a positive impact on the business. In fact, 12 months after the initial rollout, turnover rates have been nearly cut in half.

"Turnover rates are falling, and part of the reason is we now have better performance conversations and can manage those situations without getting upset or raising our voices," Andrews said. "This is allowing individuals to feel more comfortable addressing their concerns verses just quitting or walking out or having managers get frustrated and overreact. We’ve seen a noticeable change when our managers have performance-related conversations."

The training is also impacting the personal lives of RME managers. One individual had a reputation of being hot tempered and opinionated and was vocally skeptical about the effectiveness of the training. "At the end of the training, he shared how he learned to consider others’ perspectives and once he started doing that, he listened more and spoke less," Andrews said. "It was a complete transformation."

**Results at A Glance**

- Reduction in turnover from 30 percent to 16 percent
- Leadership learned to master performance-management conversations

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*About Crucial Accountability®*—Enhance accountability, improve performance, and ensure execution with Crucial Accountability. Equip participants with a straightforward, step-by-step process for identifying and resolving performance gaps—those unpleasant realities standing in the way of organizational success.

This training infuses classroom time with original video clips and examples. Course pacing is active and engaging with structured rehearsals and intense class participation. The Crucial Accountability course delivers a hands-on problem-solving approach for enhancing accountability and improving performance.

*About Crucial Conversations®*—Whenever you’re not getting the results you’re looking for, it’s likely that a crucial conversation is keeping you stuck. Whether it’s a problem with poor quality, slow time-to-market, declining customer satisfaction, or a strained relationship, if you can’t talk honestly, you can expect poor results.

This award-winning training infuses classroom time with original video clips and examples. Course pacing is active and engaging, with structured rehearsals and intense class participation. The Crucial Conversations course delivers a powerful set of influence tools that builds teams, enriches relationships, and improves end results. Participants acquire the skills that help them step up to and handle high-stakes issues.

*About VitalSmarts®*—Named one of the Top 20 Leadership Training Companies, VitalSmarts, a TwentyEighty, Inc. company, is home to the award-winning Crucial Conversations, Crucial Accountability, and Influencer and New York Times bestselling books of the same titles. When used in combination, these courses enable organizations to achieve new levels of performance by changing employee behavior. VitalSmarts has consulted with more than 300 of the Fortune 500 companies and trained more than 1.5 million people worldwide. [www.vitalsmarts.com](http://www.vitalsmarts.com)