

February 2017

Leadership and culture

How investing to improve crew culture and frontline leadership is benefiting forest manager Hancock Forest Management NZ

Kerry Ellem, GENERAL MANAGER, HANCOCK FOREST MANAGEMENT NZ

► The challenge

In 2012 Hancock's health and safety performance had plateaued. We'd already reaped most of the benefits of our previous work to improve systems and processes, and from introducing mechanisation. We realised we needed to spread our focus to two other critical areas for performance – culture and leadership.

► What we did

The first thing we tried was a cultural transformation project to address some of the behaviour occurring onsite. Then we gave leadership training to crew foremen and managers, and the frontline Hancock staff who work with our contractors. Both were voluntary and funded by Hancock – with contractors contributing crew and foremen time in kind.

Culture change

The culture project was delivered by former rugby league international Tawera Nikau and his company Team One to about 250 crew and the Hancock supervisors.

It involved one-day workshops aimed at helping people set aside old and unhelpful ways of thinking, so they could become open to adopting new ideas and ways of working. Tawera likened this process to removing 'lens scratches' from your glasses. The experiences people have in life - particularly outside of work - affects how we see the world. So it's



hard for us to think and act differently until these 'lens scratches' are dealt with.

Tawera then introduced another concept that's about looking forward – the power train – where each crew sat down and developed a mission statement for where they are going, and then how they want to get there. These statements went up on crew huts around the forests.

These workshops, which took place in September 2013, were the first time forest workers and Hancock staff had talked about the culture we wanted to have on our sites. There was huge value in us hearing each other's stories, and then being offered a way to move forward.

Front line leadership

Feedback from the workshops, and from a 2013 DuPont attitudes survey completed by all 1100 of our contractors and staff, re-affirmed to us that leadership has a really big impact on

organisational culture. As they say, the tone is set from the top and we wanted to develop leadership of safety right across our business – from the frontline to the boardroom.

This work started in early 2014, with Team One running 'Foundations of Leadership' workshops for 140 crew managers and foremen, and Hancock crew supervisors.

These workshops aimed to help people develop the 'softer' skills you need to manage people effectively – like dealing with staff issues or how to motivate people.

The response to these workshops was really enthusiastic, and encouraged us to look for other ways to develop and embed frontline leadership.



Dr Hillary Bennett, Leading Safety

In May 2015, we rolled out the 'Be a Legend' leadership programme run by organisational psychologist Dr Hillary Bennett of Leading Safety. This programme, involving five workshops over five months, enables foremen and supervisors to step-up and lead health and safety in their crews. It helps them develop the knowledge, 'mindsets' and practices they need to shape and support safe work practices. It also gives them an understanding of how their own mindset and practices shape the health and safety culture of their crews.

Everyone was expected to practise the new skills they'd learned between workshops, then come back and tell the group what they'd been

doing. That process of learning, practising and sharing experiences helped embed the new knowledge and form new habits.

Once again, Hancock staff and crew foremen/managers did the programme together and I believe the relationship between our staff and crews – which is critical to our business performance – is far better as a result of this.

About 110 people attended the 'Be A Legend' programme, and another 80 did an extension course called 'Absolute Legend'.



▶ Results to date

The biggest benefits from this work have been better communication and engagement.

We're having far more frank and valuable conversations with our contractors. We all speak the same language around health and safety now. We've got common goals and a shared understanding of how we're going to achieve them.

The thing I've personally noticed is that there's now much more openness around health and safety. The engagement is

happening and it's encouraged me and our investors to continue with these programmes.

These benefits were confirmed when we re-ran the DuPont attitudes survey in 2016. This showed a solid improvement in levels of worker engagement since 2013, and I've got no doubt that was partly due to the culture and leadership work we've done.

You know in health and safety there's a tendency to focus on procedures and systems. But human beings have the biggest impact on health and safety in the workplace. So working on the cultural side of the business - getting people to engage openly and giving them tools to be able to do that - is a big step forward in terms of how we think about health and safety.

▶ **Next steps**

We're conscious that leadership from the top is key to creating a good culture. So now we're working with Hillary to develop safety leadership programmes for our senior executives and directors.

These are likely to be workshops that will give them tools to have more meaningful and valuable conversations in the field with workers, crew foreman and our operational staff. We've found these types of onsite conversations hugely valuable in the past because they let you reconcile what you think is happening out there with what is actually happening.

Everyone knows there's no silver bullet to 'fix' health and safety. So this work is just one approach we're taking, and it runs in parallel with other safety-related strategies like mechanisation and certification for tree fallers.

But I've got no doubt that these other strategies have been more effectively driven due to the work we've done on culture and leadership. Because to enable change, you've got to engage people. And for us that means changing the culture and having leaders right through the business who can help us do that.



*A Division of Hancock Timber Resource Group,
A Manulife Asset Management Company*



▶ **About Hancock Forest Management**

Hancock Forest Management NZ is the local division of the world's largest timberland investment manager, US-based Hancock Natural Resource Group. It is the largest manager of planted forests in New Zealand, with more than 200,000 hectares of forest under management. Based in Tauranga, it supplies logs to the local market, as well as exporting to China, Japan, Korea and India. Management activities are customised to fit the characteristics of each forest.



► **View from the frontline**

Comments from contractors and Hancock staff involved in the programmes.

"It gave me an insight into how to go about having those difficult conversations with people. It gave me more tools to use to be able to do that."

SHAUN SOLOMON: Foreman, Goodman Logging.



"Not to brag about it, but now my crew has probably got the best crew culture I've ever worked in since I've been in forestry!"

JERMAINE ORMSBY: Crew Manager, GW Logging.

"There is a pecking order in a crew and before, if you weren't at the top of the chain, you just kept your mouth shut. The difference now is that everybody is communicating more at all levels during the day."

GEOFF PARSONS: Harvesting Forester, Hancock Forest Management.



"Probably the biggest change is the way Jermaine deals with the crew. It takes 10 of them to get the job done, but it all comes down to how Jermaine handles them."

GARETH WHITE: Principal, GW Logging.

"They're more honest talking to us. They're not trying to hide stuff anymore. It's been really, really good."

PADDY PENWARDEN: Harvesting Forester, Hancock Forest Management.



► **About www.safetree.nz**

Safetree.nz is an online one-stop-shop with free health and safety information and resources for people working in forestry. It is run by the Forest Industry Safety Council (FISC), a partnership between government, industry and worker representatives that's working towards a safe, resilient and professional forestry industry.