



Leadership course among
services offered by MTS
For release: Nov. 14, 2016

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Classes help Showplace Wood Products develop good leaders for growing operations

HARRISBURG, S.D. – For a company that has only been in business about 18 years, Showplace Wood Products has an impressive history.

The cabinet-making company, which started from scratch in 1999, now operates three manufacturing plants – two in Harrisburg and one in nearby Beresford. The company has 560 employees and a sales network that includes more than 600 approved dealers. It does business in all 50 states and parts of Canada.

The cabinet industry was hit hard nationally by the Great Recession, which officially lasted from December 2007 to June 2009. Showplace was affected, too, but the employee-owned company managed to ride out the downturn without laying off any workers.

Today, business is good, said Scott Korsten, director of marketing. This year, Showplace expects to top its pre-recession high in sales.

A desire to take care of people, regardless of whether they are customers, dealers or employees, has been a big part of company's success, Korsten said. The drive to constantly improve its business also has been a big factor in Showplace's success.

Showplace's desire to improve is evident in the company's willingness to invest in its employees. Since 2014, 25 Showplace employees have participated in leadership-development classes offered by South Dakota Manufacturing & Technology Solutions, or MTS. The classes for Showplace were facilitated by Lisa Te Slaa of the Precision Leadership Group Inc., one of MTS's service partners.

“The No. 1 issue with a lot of companies is leadership. That’s why we’ve partnered with Precision to provide leadership development for our clients,” said Wes Kelly, MTS center director and a business advisor based in Sioux Falls.

“With Baby Boomers retiring, that leaves a void in leadership. It’s good for companies to be filling that void with leadership development,” he said.

Vice President Bill Allen was the first Showplace employee to participate in a MTS leadership-development class. He started taking classes from Precision in 2014 at the suggestion of Paul Sova, president and chief operating officer at Showplace.

Sova got the idea for Allen to take a leadership-development course through his participation in the CEO Peer Council, another service offered by MTS. CEO Peer Council meetings give top-level executives from various companies the opportunity to get together on a regular basis to discuss common challenges that confront their companies.

Allen participated in leadership-development classes at an off-site location with executives from a half-dozen other companies. The course included eight sessions during a 12-week period.

“I liked a lot of the basic principles the class taught us. In a lot of ways, what the class taught was common sense,” Allen said. “They’re things we all know we should do, but we may not have a structured way to get them done.” Areas of focus included setting goals, managing time and delegating duties.

Since Allen’s experience, two 12-member groups of Showplace employees also have taken leadership-development classes from MTS. “I think everyone who went through the program is a better manager because of it,” Allen said. “The class provides the tools for them to become more effective in their jobs. It’s up to them to use them.”

Training classes helped Showplace leaders staff a new plant with a new product line. The new facility opened about a year ago near the main plant in Harrisburg. The company’s current emphasis in leadership development is on reinforcing the principles from MTS classes.

Classes required a significant financial investment, but it was an expense that should pay off in the long run, Allen said. “One solid business call per person could recover the cost of the class,” he said.

Te Slaa said the goal of the process is to develop effective leaders and give them the tools they need to succeed. “Participants don’t just sit in class and listen to lectures. There is lively discussion, relevant homework, and they are expected to implement what they learn each week and report on their progress,” she said.

“The focus is on improving productivity, learning how to set and achieve goals, and developing the soft skills of leadership, such as communication, delegation, problem-solving and motivation,” Te Slaa said.

She enjoyed working with Showplace. “They were by far one of my favorite companies that I’ve worked with. They just have a great culture. They’re movers and shakers. They’re growing and doing things the right way,” she said

About MTS

Manufacturing & Technology Solutions uses public and private resources to help South Dakota manufacturers grow and prosper. MTS is part of the South Dakota Small Business Development Center network of business-assistance offices.

For more information, see www.sdmanufacturing.com or www.sdbusinesshelp.com.

The SBDC has regional offices in Aberdeen, Pierre, Rapid City, Sioux Falls, Watertown and Yankton, and satellite offices in Brookings and Mitchell. In addition to MTS, programs in the SBDC network include South Dakota Procurement Technical Assistance Centers, South Dakota International Trade Center, Small Business Innovation Research programs and the Enterprise Institute. The SBDC network is an outreach program of the Beacom School of Business at the University of South Dakota.

The SBDC network is funded through the support of the Governor's Office of Economic Development, the U.S. Department of Defense, the National Institute of Standards and Technology and the Small Business Administration. Additional support comes from Xcel Energy.