C. H. Guernsey & Company

Change Agent
Carl Stover, CEO (with the company since 1966)

Company Setting
C. H. Guernsey & Company, engineering and architectural firm founded in 1928

Business Challenge
Increase growth and competitiveness through continued innovation

After taking over as CEO of C. H. Guernsey & Company in 1990, Carl Stover made significant structural changes to the organization, which was previously managed by its founding family. Stover created seven profit centers and oversaw a period of successful growth during the 1990s, reaching $25 million in revenues and increasing the workforce to 200 employees. Recognizing a continuing need for progress, Carl Stover attended the November 2001 Leading Change & Organizational Renewal executive education program at the Stanford Graduate School of Business.

Following the program, Stover decided that the LCOR principles would benefit the Guernsey operating committee in their strategic planning process. The operating committee comprised the top eighteen managers at Guernsey. Stover contacted Stanford, which partnered with him to develop an LCOR workshop.

In July 2002, Stover began collaborating with Peter Finkelstein of Stanford on an LCOR workshop approach. Stover arranged for Finkelstein to interview individual committee members, including the entire five-member board, and put him in touch with the 78-year-old son of the original founder (and previous CEO from 1962-1990) for valuable background on Guernsey’s history and culture. In September, a two-day workshop on the Solving Today’s Problems process was held in conjunction with an ongoing operating committee meeting.

“It really forced us to address issues that will have long-term ramifications for the success of the firm,” notes Stover. The operating committee subsequently implemented several action items adopted during the LCOR workshop and continues to use the LCOR model as a template for ongoing strategic planning discussions. More recently, Stover arranged three additional LCOR workshops for Guernsey’s operating committee, the five-member board, and for a broader team of employees from one of the company’s seven business groups.

Stover sees the opportunity for significant improvements across the entire organization and sponsors lunchtime meetings to continue the educational program, using short videos from the Solving Today’s Problems CD-ROM to help Guernsey’s multi-faceted workforce “better communicate with each other and identify opportunities, remove obstacles, and develop a shared vision.” The key, says Stover, was starting at the top and involving the most senior managers as a cross-departmental change team.

“The collaboration across business units is more robust than it’s been in years,” says one engineering vice president.

“We are very pleased with the product you have provided,” says Stover. “We very much would like to continue the relationship.”

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