

Pinder models what it means to balance love and discipline. He has a unique ability to remember names, and he knows the names of all his team members, their family members, and the personal interests of all his employees. He is available 24/7 to all his employees. Pinder has an open door policy and addresses problems immediately. He also emphasizes leadership continually through mentoring and formal training. As he walks around the plant, he stops to visit. Handshakes and hugs are characteristic. Through this constant interaction, he keeps a pulse on the organization, and knows what is happening with individual team members. He requires the same of his leadership team.

Stories are characteristics of Pinder's leadership style, and they contribute to Cardinal's strong culture and identity. He loves sports and brings in many interesting stories. Signs on the walls remind team members of their pursuit of excellence in all they do. The following quote from Vince Lombardi is posted in the plant and emphasized by team leaders:

Gentlemen, we are going to relentlessly chase perfection, knowing full well we will not catch it, because nothing is perfect. But we are going to relentlessly chase it because in the process we will catch excellence. I am not remotely interested in just being good.

ETHICAL EXPECTATIONS

Employees are rarely terminated, but certain actions can result in dismissal. The non-negotiable aspects of behavior are clear, and they are backed by consequences. First, if employees are not living up to the four criteria (work hard, good attitude, team player, support the mission), they can be terminated. There are actually very few of those situations because the hiring and mentoring processes are so strong.

At the same time, Pinder has zero tolerance for racist or sexist comments and jokes, stealing, fighting, drugs, or alcohol in the plant. Pinder is a role model, and his actions match his words. If something is not right, he immediately talks to the team leaders and asks them why they handled the situation the way they did. If it was done incorrectly, he stresses the importance of doing it right. Generally, there is no mystery in knowing what should be done. The balance of discipline and respect/caring of the individual team members is discussed often by the management and the team members.

One story Pinder tells has to do with a Cardinal employee who reported a team leader made a racist joke. Another employee reported a similar incident with the same team leader. "It was honorable that these employees spoke up and alerted us to the situation. We called the team leader in and asked him if it was true. He admitted it and was terminated." Racism is unacceptable and dismissal, if it happens, is non-negotiable. All employees know this.

Although Cardinal's non-negotiable elements are clear, the more difficult part of leadership is dealing with consequences in situations where the solution is less defined. Another example that Pinder gives shows mentoring at a crucial moment.

Sometimes we just need to remind people of what is important. We had a team leader who I heard complaining about "all these people and how hard it was to work with them" (referring to New Americans). It was a leadership moment, and I asked him if he was just planted here or did his parents or grandparents come to this area from somewhere else? He

said they had come from Norway, and I asked him if they spoke English when they came, and he replied “no.” He realized that he was just being ignorant. After our talk he changed his attitude.

ALIGNED INCENTIVES, REWARDS, AND RECOGNITION

There are positive consequences for meeting or exceeding performance expectations, too. All employees are part of Cardinal’s profit-sharing plan. Cardinal IG pays their employees well but, in addition, they can receive anywhere up to 52 percent additional each month if they meet the target profit goal. The profit-sharing plan is aligned with the culture of performance and teamwork and serves another purpose as well—recruitment. Cardinal IG in general does not advertise or recruit outside of the company for new employees. According to Pinder, “...we have very low turnover. People leave mainly to return to school or to their family. When we want to hire someone new we ask our employees to recommend someone, and the candidates are brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, cousins, and friends. Nobody recommends anyone who would not work hard and contribute to the team.”

An important part of the Cardinal IG culture is the award program for recognizing exceptional team members and exceptional teams. Since January 2000, the company has given 140 Employee of the Month awards. The New Americans received 80 of those awards, or 57 percent. Employee of the Month awardees are eligible to compete for the Employee of the Year Award. The Employee of the Year Award is presented at the company’s annual employee banquet held at the Ramada Plaza & Suites in Fargo with all employees and spouses present. In the past 11 years, nine of the Employee of the Year awards have been received by New Americans.

SYNERGY THROUGH DIVERSITY

Pinder believes the success of “the Big Story” of Cardinal IG is largely a result of the numerous individual stories of the New Americans who found their way to Cardinal IG. While others viewed this segment of the population as too difficult to communicate with and work with, Pinder applied his trademark formula of discipline and love and built an enormous strength for Cardinal IG.

I believe—and many believe—that we’ve got the best workforce out of 29 factories in 16 states here in Fargo. Why is that? The only thing I can come up with is that we’re different. We didn’t grow up together and go to school together, go to church together—we don’t know everything about each other so we’re not all thinking alike. We’re from 15 different countries, different cultures, different ways of doing things, and we bring different stuff to the table. And that, synergistic effect, I believe, has enabled us to get to a level that others have not gotten to.
(Bock, Open Magazine, Winter 2007, p 38)

Pinder is often asked if language is a barrier as many of the New Americans come from poor and disrupted countries. He comments, “Heck, no. If someone comes to Cardinal and does not speak English, we put that individual with someone who does (they pair