

Investing On Purpose

Training and Retaining Employees:
Metro Auto Recyclers Thinks Differently and Yield Big Results.

W

hat makes us different? You know, there are a lot of good auto recyclers across the country and many of them, like us, are pushing to be better. We learned you have to think differently, and for us, we focused on quality processes and quality people,” explains Steve Dykstra, owner of Valparaiso, Ind. based Metro Auto Recyclers. He and CEO Neil Samahon attribute their new way of thinking to their growth and recent achievements.

With humble beginnings, this family-owned business launched in 1988 with Metro Recycling, launching sister company Metro Auto in 1998. Metro Auto continues to grow, adding acreage, new buildings, a growing staff, and additional locations in Illinois and Indiana. They recycle over 1,000 vehicles annually. Dykstra admits their focus on quality is what allowed them to grow and achieve honors including joining the PRP Network, ARA’s Gold Seal Program, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) Clean Yard Gold Status, and most recently

completing the Recycling Industry Operating Standard (RIOS) certification. Metro Auto is one of only seven Indiana auto yards to receive the IDEM gold status and is the first and only auto recycler to achieve the RIOS certification. Achieving these certifications was the catalyst for many changes at Metro, including not only workflow efficiencies, but also a new focus on their employees – the quality people that make it all happen.

“We’re trying to be known as a trading partner that we ourselves would want to work with,” states Samahon.



Workshops have been implemented to help managers improve key skills, such as interviews and the hiring process. NorthStar360 develops and customizes all workshops to address challenges and opportunities that are specific to Metro.

Quality Processes

These certifications charged the Metro Auto team to think differently first and foremost about their internal processes and meeting the industry's standard for quality, environmental, and health & safety (QEH&S).

Metro Auto worked with Jim Counts of Counts Consulting to seek direct improvements to their internal processes.

Changes included quality – development of a quality control department to ensure all parts are clean, presentable and as described to the customer; environmental – planting several green space areas and lining the perimeter of the yard with trees; and, health & safety – a redesign of the delivery trucks to accommodate a pallet jack, reorganizing parts with a bar code system, relocating heavier products on ground level/lower shelves, installing cranes in the dismantling section and reducing fork lift traffic.

In a nutshell, all these changes contributed to a more efficient work environment, and have had direct results on their bottom line. With fewer injuries and 3 to 4 fewer employees on payroll because of more efficient workflow, the positive financial impact,



Susan Riddering, vice president of NorthStar360 and Steve Dykstra, owner of Metro Auto tour the yard after a coaching session.

is in the ballpark of \$100,000-\$200,000. Although these certifications were consuming, it was only part of the puzzle.

A focus on quality people was the next step and Metro Auto needed help.

Quality People

“As a small business we fly by the seat of our pants sometimes. We quickly recognized

that we really have a long way to go on how we train and retain people,” explains Dykstra. Metro Auto's initial interest in developing their staff was rooted in a high turnover with temporary to hire workers with sister company Metro Recycling. “We knew we needed to do something, and that's when Susan knocked on our door.”

Metro Auto teamed with Rick and Susan Riddering of NorthStar360 Business Solutions to identify key business challenges that were impeding growth – starting with the high turnover with temp to hire workers. The team agreed employee assessments were the best first step.

Taking an assessment is the best first step for many reasons. Even the act of surveying your employees



A better organization of parts and developing a bar code to scan parts was one strategy to improve efficiency and safety at the Valparaiso site. John Leegwater, operations manager (left), Susan Riddering, vice president of NorthStar360 (middle) and Steve Dykstra, owner of Metro Auto (right) talk in the parts warehouse.

can have a powerful impact, showing them that you care about them and are willing to invest in continual training. For Dykstra and Samahon, the assessment process helped to accomplish two things: 1. Measure current employees' strengths and areas for development and 2. Ensure new hires were a great fit for the position.

"Providing employees with development opportunities will not only decrease any skill gaps, but will also cause a tremendous confidence boost – contributing to an increase in productivity and morale," explains Susan Riddering, vice president of NorthStar360.

Current employees have learned about their strengths and what they bring to Metro Auto. For managers, skill gaps have been identified and they attend concept-based workshops designed to bridge those specific gaps. For the management team, some of those topics have included time management, the five roles of leadership, personal productivity and managing change. After each seminar, managers work with a business coach from NorthStar360 to talk about how they have implemented those new skills and concepts at Metro Auto.

"The coaching call was like a check-up to see how I was doing and what I had changed or put into play since the workshop," said John Leegwater, operations manager. "Hey what are you doing about this? No one wants to admit they've dropped the ball or not followed up on a task, so the coaching call keeps a level of awareness alive much longer than 48 hours after the session."

Dykstra agrees that the coaching increases accountability for what you have learned and helped identify and define action steps to apply to daily work life. "It's really a key component of the learning process."

Second, NorthStar360 introduced a few improvements to Metro Auto's interviewing and hiring process. They discovered potential candidates did not fully understand the job description and expectations before accepting a position. The revised hiring process includes a pre-employment assessment for key competencies.

Potential job candidates now complete a brief survey which identifies their strengths and weaknesses – helping to better predict success in a new job. The pre-employment assessment has become an integral

part of the hiring process. When used in combination with the application and interview, the assessment helps identify candidates that are a good fit for a particular job.

"It is nice to have a tool that identifies candidates who are a good fit, so we're not just going on our gut-feelings," explains Samahon. In fact, for Metro Auto, the three new hires that participated in NorthStar360's assessment have been very effective in their positions. The pre-employment assessment process helps to minimize the risks associated with hiring which can be very costly.

The team also created a more formal interview process with a standard list of questions for all candidates. NorthStar360 created a custom training program for Metro Auto's managers and supervisors to establish this more formalized process. Riddering explains that not only has this training given managers and interviewers a new confidence, it ensures Metro Auto is EEOC compliant during all interviews. The response from interviewees has been positive as well. "We hear that we ask questions that really make you think. It has definitely added more professionalism to our process, showing new candidates that our team is



One recent expansion at the Metro Auto Valparaiso, Ind. facility includes a new indoor dismantling building, seen above.



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prepared and focused,” explains Dykstra.

Dykstra and Samahon said the results for Metro Auto have been business-changing, increasing employee productivity, retention and morale. Employees are happier and more fulfilled.

“Our people see we’re trying to develop them so we can grow to new levels. We care about them, and we have created more credibility as a company,” Dykstra explains.

As for the bottom line, there are direct savings from decreased turn-over. “We all know turnover costs money in searching for a candidate, training and day to day turmoil from having a vacant position,” said Dykstra. In addition, there are savings from indirect costs like increased productivity, retention and morale.

Metro owner Dykstra and CEO Samahon are confident these changes and development were necessary to take their business to the next level.

“This has been a process to position ourselves for growth,” explains Samahon. “We couldn’t have imagined growing further because we had a lot of cleaning

Hiring a consultant can be scary because businesses associate it with a high cost.

But it was exactly what this owner needed to take Metro to the next level.

up to do. Since we’ve done this, we’ve been confident enough to add another location. That’s why we partnered with Rick and Susan.”

Dykstra admits that hiring a consultant can be scary because businesses associate it with a high cost. But for this family-owned business,

it was exactly what was needed to take Metro to the next level, and Dykstra assures businesses there is a great return on investment. He recommends companies research area consultants. For Metro, NorthStar-360 specializes in growing small to mid-size businesses, a perfect fit for Metro. “Rick and Susan are our experts,” said Dykstra, “they helped us to think differently and look at the results! ■

NorthStar360 Business Solutions helps businesses maximize their success through comprehensive hiring practices and in-depth employee development programs. For more information on NorthStar360, please call (219) 864-1576 or visit www.northstar360.com.

Metro Recycling Facility’s commitment to recycling and the environment began in 1988 when it opened in Blue Island, Ill. Since then, two additional metal recycling facilities were opened in Indiana. For more information on Metro, please call (219) 462-3753 or visit www.metroautorecyclers.com.

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