



CASE STUDY: POWERING UP ON WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT

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Valley
POWER SYSTEMS, INC.

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Workforce management is a key area of focus in field service, as seen in results of The Service Council's surveying of more than 250 organizations. The goal of workforce management initiatives is not only to reduce time spent on ineffective activities and improve productivity but also to empower the workforce with better information and knowledge in order to manage their daily lives and enhance relationships with customers. More so, workforce management activities in the service realm no longer just focus on task management and scheduling but also touch upon hiring, training, planning and workforce engagement, areas that require a collaborative relationship between the business function and HR.

Valley Power Systems, based near Los Angeles California, is all about power. The organization distributes on-highway and off-highway diesel and natural gas power products to customers primarily in Alaska, Hawaii, Baja Mexico, Asia, and Latin America. In addition the company delivers spare parts, as well as power management and repair services to its customers. The company has 400 employees of which nearly 50 are field service technicians. To learn a little more about the organization's workforce management initiatives, we caught up with Ramona Fierro, the HR Director.

How does Valley Power differentiate itself from its competitors?

While we are in the business of delivering power our complete focus is on delivering the best products, the best parts, and the best service. That comes from our people who ultimately serve as our differentiator.

You had embarked on a workforce management initiative primarily involved around better timekeeping and time management. Why did your organization choose to do so?

We started our timekeeping initiative in 2010. At that time, due to paper-based recording in the field and manual data entry processes, we were placed in a situation where we were faced with \$100,000 of chargebacks wherein customers were disputing work that had actually been done. With our processes at the time, field technicians were recording time, labor and expense on a sheet of paper, which wasn't always signed by the customer. These data points were then provided to a customer service agent who entered them into our timekeeping and customer management systems. Not only did this result in errors and customer conflict, but it also led to a significant delay in appropriately invoicing and receiving payment from our customers.

What steps did you take to rectify the solution?

We knew we needed a better system to manage timekeeping and to accurately record the work that was done. Hence, we were looking at a timekeeping system being provided by Kronos who alerted us to the benefits of its mobile application that allowed us to manage work done at the point of service. With the aid of the mobile solution, our field workers could track all the work done on their mobile devices. Once a task was completed, our field workers could close their work orders and the system would record

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the time and location of work done, which was then automatically inputted into our HR and customer management systems.

Change management is big concern when implementing a new system. How did your organization work through some of the challenges?

Well, we thought that there would be some concern around us tracking the location of our field technicians and were pleasantly surprised when it never really came up. The reason for this is that we followed a very structured process of involving employee champions in the deployment of our solution. This was essential and something that we learned quickly when we did our due diligence and research. As a result, we sought out a volunteer from each one of our fourteen branches to learn about the new technology being developed to help our employees, the company, and the customers. We trained them in the use of the technology and the applications and asked them for input and feedback. These champions then sold the idea of the solution to their respective branches and became go to resources for any questions around the technology and applications. This gave them a sense of pride and ownership around the project.

What other steps did your organization take to ensure that field workers embraced the new solution?

While the big brother issue wasn't really a big challenge for us, we did run into the issue of essentially teaching our technicians how time works. What I mean by that is teaching them the importance of tracking and managing their time and the impact of mismanagement on our bottom line as well as the customer's. While this doesn't seem all that complicated it can become a big issue and required a dedicated focus on training. As a result we did a series of classes for our various teams to walk through the application and the implication of work recorded improperly on the employees' paychecks, on company revenues and on customer satisfaction. We helped them translate time into money, a language that anyone at any level can understand.

Have you been able to eliminate the chargeback issue with the aid of your workforce management solution?

We deployed the solution in 2011 and with the aid of timely and accurate billing were able to eliminate the entire chargeback challenge for our business. That in itself amounted to \$100,000 in savings. More so, with the automatic recording of work done we no longer needed our customer support agents to be focused on data entry and they were refocused on meeting the needs of our customers. As a result of these improved efficiencies we not only experiencing faster billing times but were able to experience improved employee and customer satisfaction rates.

We have also extended the timekeeping application to all employees and have removed manual processes tied to Paid Time Off and vacation management. Therefore, we have freed up our HR resources who can now focus on better training initiatives in order to

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add value to our company and allowed continued differentiation via the products and service that we deliver.

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