

DuPont Crop Protection “Seizes” Change as a Competitive Advantage

In late 2006, the Crop Protection division of DuPont, led by Jim Collins, underwent a major restructuring, to realign the organization to the competitive realities of the market place and to position itself for future growth. From the start, it was recognized that these changes could not be seen by employees as a onetime event that would solve the business’ needs. The road to competitiveness must be viewed as an ongoing journey, or in a few years time, the business would likely find itself in another major restructuring and the significant disruptions and stress that such events entail. The concept of constant change being the norm, and the journey mindset that must be adopted by everyone was what first attracted Crop Protection to Karl’s message. At one session where Karl spoke to the senior leaders of DuPont, Jim says “it was as if Karl was speaking directly to me...he had the message that I was searching for — mastering the ability to change quickly — no matter that the market throws at you — would be key to competing in the cyclic and dynamic Ag products market globally.”

Jim recognized that he needed to not only re-energize his leadership team in the wake of the restructuring, but needed to ingrain this new mindset and provide his team the tools that would allow them to adapt more quickly to an increasingly dynamic agriculture market place. Jim and many of his senior leadership team had participated in workshops that Karl Schoemer had led for the DuPont Corporation and enlisted VisionQuest to train over 100 leaders, representing all regions of Crop Protection’s worldwide business, in the New Reality. Karl’s workshop was part of a weeklong leadership summit and was rated by the participants as one of the most valuable and enlightening sessions.

Three quarters of DuPont Crop Protection’s sales occur outside the United States, so there were some initial questions as to how well the New Reality message would translate to other cultures. What we found was that the message is indeed universal and that having a common language and framework allows concepts to be reinforced at all levels of the organization. As a company that has integrated the principles of Six Sigma into its business practices, the idea of managing change as a process vs. dealing with change as an event, had strong resonance.

The most significant impact so far has been an increase in the speed in which the employees move through change and the spirit in which they accept it, and since the workshop in January 2008, the team has faced many changes both internally and externally-driven. In the past, we have been good at first explaining the elements of change — the what, when, where, and how. Now we are getting much better at first making the case for change. A key insight (especially for Jim) that has helped us to get better is the realization that as leaders we’re always ahead of the rest of the organization in moving through the stages of change and we must adjust our communication to remember that fact. As Karl says — the last thing your team needs to hear at the start of any change cycle is “It’s gonna be great!”. Helping us adjust our message not only to the audience, but the “timing” of the audience’s stage of change was powerful. It may not sound profound, but the way Karl put the whole process together really made sense for us and where we were at the time. We have more to do, but we’re better today thanks to the insights gained from the workshops.