



DAVID A MARSHALL CONSULTING INC.

How Did We Handle Racism At Robroy? How Do You Pivot During A Crisis?

FROM MY 20+ YEARS AS AN EXECUTIVE IN
MANUFACTURING

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HOW DID WE HANDLE RACISM AT ROBROY

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We never had to deal with too much racism during my time at Robroy, mostly because I made sure people knew that wasn't allowed. One day, we had an incident where someone had scribbled someone's name on a bathroom door, and calling them a racial slur. I certainly wasn't going to stand for that or allow it in our workplace.

That day, I put a stop to all work, gathered everyone together on the factory floor, and told the entire company all at once that this was not acceptable. Not to the individual in question, or the organization as a whole. I apologized directly to the person who the slur was directed at, on behalf of myself and the company. I told everyone that this was a Zero Tolerance environment for racism, sexism, and intolerance of any kind. I said that if I ever found out who did that, or if I found someone doing it again, they would be immediately fired. I wanted to make sure that everyone heard the same message at the same time, and to know that there was no room in any environment for that kind of behavior.

I made sure that everyone believed what I had said, and it set the stage for everyone else in terms of my expectations. We all know that this kind of behavior is unacceptable. It's never acceptable to treat someone poorly in the first place, but it's even more heinous to do it on the basis of someone's skin color, nationality, gender, religion, or physical or mental disabilities. It's reprehensible and immoral, and it takes a special kind of nasty to do it

.I was perfectly justified in creating a Zero Tolerance environment for discrimination, even if it was only for humanitarian reasons. People deserve to be treated with courtesy and dignity, and I made sure this was always the case in the workplaces I managed. But personal feelings aside, there are some important business reasons why a company should never tolerate racism, sexism, or any other kind of discrimination. For one thing, it's completely illegal. The Civil Rights Act, the Americans With Disabilities Act, and other laws make it illegal to create a hostile work environment or discriminate against someone on the basis of race, sex, nationality, religion, age, disability, military service, and so on. Companies have been successfully sued for millions of dollars for simply allowing racism and sexism to happen at work. If nothing else, that piece of racist graffiti in our bathroom could have resulted in an expensive lawsuit.

For another, a hostile work environment affects company morale, which can affect productivity. If people aren't happy at work or they feel bullied and harassed, they won't produce and help your company succeed.

So even if your only concerns were productivity and efficiency, and not the well-being of your fellow humans, you should be concerned that racism can hurt your bottom line. Bottom line, you may not be able to control what people do or think in their personal lives, but you can control what people do in the company. And any form of discrimination is very disruptive to the company culture and its effectiveness.

The company has an obligation to look after the customer — that's the ultimate goal, because it's the customer that pays our salaries. Any disruption to that process is going to disrupt the customer, and collectively, the company will suffer. So, in your private life, you might be a bigot, but when you're at work, you must adhere by the standards and the norms within the enterprise. End

HOW DO YOU QUICKLY PIVOT DURING A CRISIS?

When you think of an aircraft carrier, you tend to think of them as slow-moving, unwieldy vessels that are best suited to going in a straight line and needing half a day just to execute a turn. But you would be wrong! A Nimitz-class aircraft carrier can make a 180-degree turn in a matter of a few minutes.

Of course, when making these turns, the ship heels quite a bit and I imagine there's a lot going on inside as everything rolls, slides, and flies to one side of the ship, which means everything had to be prepared, secured, battened down, and made ready for those maneuvers.

During the pandemic, we've seen a lot of companies close down and put their employees on furlough. It's understandable, because either their customers aren't buying what they're selling, or their sellers aren't providing the raw materials they need.

But other companies are not only still operating, they're thriving. These are companies that were able to pivot from their normal operations and are producing something new that still fits within their abilities and expertise. The USS America. They began to pivot and change their scope of operation, but to do it, they needed everyone in the operation to prepare, secure, batten down, and make ready their own areas of responsibility so they and the company could be successful. Continued Page 4

For example, anyone who works in the fashion industry making dresses and shirts could easily pivot within a few days and begin making face masks and hospital gowns for medical professionals and first responders. The technology and the abilities are the same, but the designs are different. And even if they have never made hospital gowns or face masks before, there are designs and patterns online, and they already know how to sew and have sewing machines.

But companies like Ford, GM, and Tesla — the aircraft carriers of the automotive industry — have pivoted in a more complex way. GM recently brought back some employees back to work in their Kokomo, Indiana factory and began making ventilators for hospitals to use on COVID-19 patients who need breathing assistance. It's actually not that difficult to pivot if you're a large company with vast resources.

As Vox.com recently said: Car companies have large factories, mass production experience, and connections to supply chains needed for the hundreds of parts that go into a ventilator. But repurposing a car factory to make a medical device as complex as a ventilator isn't easy.

To make the ventilators, GM is making a stripped-down version of Ventec's existing VOCSN ventilator, called the V+Pro, and producing it with fewer parts and a shorter production time. They also include the features that critically ill patients will need, but they're cheaper and easier to use.

Even so, a ventilator is a sophisticated piece of equipment, which means Ventec would have needed to open up their databases to provide all the specs on their components, the types of metals needed, the types of machining each component needs, and the type of programming needed for the system to run. An effort like this would take a team of engineers who are dedicated to learning the system and executing.

Not everyone has that capability, which is why it's Ford, GM, and Tesla who are able to step up and make it happen. They have access to a vendor base that could already make those components with some retooling and planning. Those vendors likely already have access to the types of raw materials, like a certain grade of stainless steel.

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PIVOTING OFTEN MEANS WORKING WITHIN YOUR MEANS

The earlier example of clothing manufacturers switching to hospital gowns and face masks shows how easy some companies can make some simple changes to their purpose, as long as they already have the equipment and raw materials.

If you're a 3D printing or additive manufacturing company, that's easy. You could switch from medical components to furniture to video game accessories in literally a few hours. But for other companies, they may need some additional time.

For example, one of Robroy's companies, Stahlin, made fiberglass containers, running high volume items on a press. For low-volume items, they would just make it in a mold. But if they wanted to switch their operation to turning out a high volume item like, say, bathtubs, they would need to come up with a new press, which could take a few weeks.

They would also have to redefine their processes, which would require the collaboration between the engineers and production associates. In other places, like the automotive industry, since no one is working, they were able to put their engineering departments to work and ramp up an entire factory to start working on this new product fairly quickly. In essence, they turned their aircraft carrier in a matter of metaphorical minutes, and were able to get their great ship heading in a new direction.

Are you ready to pivot? Has this current crisis helped you rethink your company's function and purpose? With the right kind of planning and preparing, you could easily make the switch and begin producing some new products. Contact me to learn how I can help. .End

About David A Marshall

David Marshall is a Senior Manufacturing Executive with Corporate Culture Development and Operational Excellence Expertise. David most recently was President and COO of Robroy Industries and Board Member where he oversaw this manufacturing organization with four locations in the USA producing high quality electrical products and oilfield products. During his tenure he worked hard on implementing cutting-edge technology into these facilities during renovations of several of the plants and build out of one ultra-modern 130,000 square foot manufacturing facility in Texas.

With David guidance, these companies saw a remarkable seven record years of profitability; eleven consecutive years with profitability exceeding 20% of revenue; and more than \$300 million added to the equity of the business since going private in 2001. David earned his MBA from the University of Virginia: Darden School of Business.

He currently consults manufacturers looking to achieve operation excellence. His motto is: "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it."

He has been a manufacturing executive, as well as a sales and marketing professional, for a few decades. Now he helps companies turn around their own company by making the right decision. If you would like more information, please visit my website and connect with me on Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn.
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