

## Developing Employees Inside and Outside



Norm Doll, Pieper Electric

“We’re in the service business so employee development is a constant consideration,” says Norm Doll, president of Pieper Electric. “Our business is built purely on people.”

For over fifty years, the 500 or so employees of Pieper Electric have been serving predominately commercial and heavy industrial customers in Wisconsin, Northern Illinois, and parts of Iowa and Minnesota as a full-

service mechanical and electrical contractor. Besides office and managerial personnel, Pieper is represented by eighteen unions. Doll has been president for the past seven (7) of his twenty-year career with the company.

According to Doll, “We are a very process focused company - we have to be given the sheer number of people we employee and how geographically spread out our projects and our people are. It all requires supervision. So we bring folks in and grow them (for supervisory positions).”

Supervisory talent is comprised of nearly an even 50/50 split of college interns, typically with engineering degrees, and trades-people.

Pieper’s supervisory employee development approaches focus largely on continuous training and peer group interaction. Doll is a strong advocate of training and deeply believes in the benefits of the peer interactions.

“The technical training and engineering we can ‘buy’ from great schools around the area. The State of Wisconsin has a terrific, 5-year apprenticeship program for the trades, and we recruit predominately from local and Midwest colleges and universities for our engineering talent. On-the-job training is obviously company-wide and on going. Our training department trains continuously in the quality

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## The Business Case For Employee Development

VRH president Jonathan Dehlinger recently spoke to approximately fifty (50) training and development professionals from southeastern Wisconsin on employee development and succession planning. During this presentation, these training and development professionals were asked to provide a rationale for investing organizational resources in employee development. Their arguments proved consistent with those offered by human resource professionals throughout the United States and Europe when confronted with the same key question.

Here is a summary of their answers.

1. Retention of talented staff
2. Productivity (higher quality results; capability to do more with less)
3. Allow managers to delegate more - confidence in surrounding talent allows managers to push more responsibility downward
4. Coverage of functions in economic downturn - staff can be spread around to meet changing demands
5. Employer of choice - conveys image of employer as forward thinking; valuing and growing talents of staff

6. Prepare for economic recovery - can move quickly when business picks up
7. Adapt to constant business change - good people can more easily adjust to shifting priorities

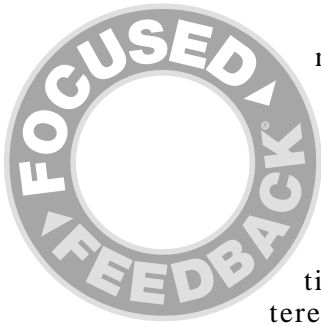
It was the observation of these training and development professionals that investing in employee development - even if some eventually leave the organization - is far superior to not investing in employee development and having them stay!

Their ‘best practices’ can be found at the VRH website - [vrhconsulting.com](http://vrhconsulting.com) - at the ASTD Best Practices link found under the major page heading, Managers and Human Resource Professionals. If you have a ‘best practice’ approach or method you wish to share, please send to [jon@vrhconsulting.com](mailto:jon@vrhconsulting.com) for inclusion on the list.

A summary of this presentation is also available by contacting [jon@vrhconsulting.com](mailto:jon@vrhconsulting.com), or calling (414) 259-9722 or (800) 259-1091.

And while you’re at the Managers and Human Resource Professionals page, the ASTD Reading List link offers a listing of ‘must read’ business books. Let VRH know what books are being read in your organization.

# Focused Feedback® for Professional Growth



VRH proudly introduces its newest service offering, Focused Feedback®, the 360-degree feedback approach to leadership development for executives on the move.

“Focused Feedback® is ideal for the busy executive since it is tightly structured and administered,” says VRH’s Dr. Jonathan Dehlinger. “It has a defined six-step timeline and the feedback can be dispensed electronically or via the telephone, eliminating typical travel time and expenses associated with traditional ‘in-office’ coaching and development approaches.”

“This Focused Feedback® service will not be appropriate in all circumstances, but will be a convenient and powerful support process for many.”

Focused Feedback® features:

- Multi-point (360°) evaluation of leadership behavior by comparing perceptions of self, managers, and up to six (6) peers, subordinates or customers.
- Comprehensive feedback.
- Concrete goals for leadership development and behavioral change.

- Focus on one *primary* leadership performance goal that is practical, measurable, and manageable.
- Definitive timeline with a starting and ending period to the coaching process.
- Prescribed number of coaching sessions.
- Coaching process supported by email and telephone conferencing.
- A nominal, fixed fee.
- “Wrap-up” meeting with immediate supervisor to evaluate progress.
- Option for extended coaching activity.

The six-step Focused Feedback® process, which should span approximately four months, includes the following sessions:

1. Introduction of the process and describing how it works for those involved.
2. 360° evaluation, analysis and comprehensive feedback. Identification of the primary goal and assignment of ‘homework’ such as behaviors to practice on the job, etc.
3. Coaching session - evaluating ‘homework’ progress and any emerging actions.
4. Coaching session - deeper version of Step #3.
5. Coaching session - deeper version of Step #4 paying careful attention to perceptions of progressive improvement.

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## Employee Development In Action - A Best Practice



Tom Peterson, Ozaukee Bank

At the monthly meetings of the Initiative Management Committee, the senior management at Ozaukee Bank (Wisconsin) convenes to discuss issues important to the bank. One of the agenda items provides for the opportunity to bring in relevant, outside business information for discussion.

One of the committee members uncovered a Jack Welch letter addressing General Electric (GE) shareholders on strategic employee development and leadership initiatives necessary for the company’s future. A key part of the letter acknowledged that it is people that propel any organization. Welch went on to describe the dilemmas inherent with both the top 10% - cannot lose them - and bottom 10% - need to address - of GE employees, understanding that all business plans are impacted by these critical people decisions.

Initiative Management Committee member Tom Peterson, first vice president and Mequon office manager, read the letter and volunteered to present the letter’s content. He also led the ensuing discussion among his peers on the committee.

“We discovered that what Welch described at his organization was a direct parallel to our organization. It offered us a fresh look into our situation and gave us a way to begin to dialogue about a topic we had great reluctance to talk about before this discussion. Rather than ‘wishing away’ our obstacles, this discussion put them on the table in a new light. Uncovering problems and finding solutions requires input from other people and only through participation and discussion does ownership develop.”

“Leading this type of discussion was very gratifying for me personally,” adds Peterson. “The entire committee thought it was a good experience. We got some great dialogue going - now we need to keep it going. Ozaukee Bank is always looking at how other organizations handle these types of issues. The committee acknowledged that this has opened the door for further discussions on coaching and development of employees throughout the bank.”

# Employee Development at Work

*What does the term “employee development” mean in your organization?*

Employee development may bring to mind such approaches as classroom training, performance reviews, and tuition reimbursement programs. Leadership development, professional coaching, and 360-degree feedback may also be likely components. Whether traditional or non-traditional, formal or informal, most organizations acknowledge the need for employee development.

For a small architectural/engineering design firm in Wisconsin’s Fox Valley, a systematic approach to employee development plays a major role in their continuing success. This organization of approximately 60 employees follows a pragmatic, practical, and well-thought-out approach to employee development:

- 1. Hire quality people - ‘better’ people are easier to develop.**
- 2. Assign to the ‘best fit’ client segment.**
- 3. Establish mentoring pairs two-levels up.**
- 4. Monitor the pairings to ensure success.**
- 5. Employee development is lateral, not hierarchical.**
- 6. President/owner takes personal responsibility for employee development.**

The key is to select the right individual at the outset, or “hire to the task,” by matching the individual to the position and client segment to be served.

Different demands for success exist within each of the three specialty client segments served by this firm. For example, one of the segments requires individuals who excel at a more collaborative, creative, fresh approach with clients. At the other extreme, more conservative projects require individuals who are most comfortable with structured and formalized architectural standards and procedures. In short, each segment requires a distinct set of skills, talents and motivation to succeed, and employees are assigned accordingly.

Equally important, this firm is religious about mentoring - from two levels up in the organization where practical skills and knowledge can be transferred. A great deal of conscious effort goes into effective mentor pairings.

“Employees get all the experiential advantages without the encumbrances of a boss or peer relationship, plus they are attached to a project where a great deal of skill development and knowledge transfer happens,” according to the owner.

The owner invests himself by typically spending 20% of his time during any given week in some activity related to the mentoring process, whether in group discussion with project managers regarding pairings, or in a direct technical/personal coaching conversation with individual employees.

The firm also views employee development from a lateral versus hierarchical perspective. Employees are encouraged to gain deeper knowledge and expertise in a given area or industry. In short, they become experts.

By paying close attention to those they hire and matching each individual with an appropriate mentor, employee development takes on a measured accountability throughout the organization. Performance statistics that exceed the norm are typical for this firm. Not only does this firm enjoy exceptional financial success and unsurpassed customer satisfaction, but employee morale is high and turnover is low. This firm is a role model in the industry, and they are the employer-of-choice in their geographic market place.

The owner attributes the firm’s successes to one simple belief - he treats his employees as if they were **his** children. Opportunities abound for teaching, guiding, communicating values and exhibiting those values. He has genuine parental pride for each his employees and looks out for their best interest, at least as far as any employer can. “We want what’s best for our clients and then the company. To the extent possible, we want both our clients and employees to be happy.”

According to VRH president Dr. Jonathan Dehlinger who has a long-standing relationship with this firm, “We work with them on selecting employees who ‘fit’ the client cultures and offer input on the pairings or mentoring match-ups. It’s a process that really works.”

For ideas about employee development approaches that work in your organization, contact VRH at (414) 259-9722 or (800) 259-1091, or email [jon@vrhconsulting.com](mailto:jon@vrhconsulting.com).



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and customer services areas. The company also offers an in-house 'STP' or Supervisory Training Program and a formal Mastery of Management Program."

"But what I feel is absolutely key is to give supervisors and managers access to good peers, both inside the company AND outside, large- or small-group, whenever possible. For example, the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA) has regular peer group meetings for students at Milwaukee School of Engineering, and TEC, a professional development group for CEOs, presidents and business owners in Wisconsin and Michigan, offers a senior management program."

"I personally have three professional sources for assistance and advice. One is a large peer group, another is a smaller group, and I go to Jon (Dehlinger) at VRH for executive coaching because he is very smart and experienced."

"We think we know what we need to do at Pieper for developing our people...we're not always great at doing it, but at least we're striving to do a better job. Our people are critical to our success."

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## Focused Feedback® by VRH

6. "Wrap-up" meeting, which includes immediate manager, discussing what happened during the feedback process and next steps, if any.

According to Dehlinger, "Our expectation is that Focused Feedback® will provide enhanced leadership development feedback utilizing a managed and comfortable approach that will not sacrifice individual productivity."

To find out more about Focused Feedback® contact Dehlinger via email at [jon@vrhconsulting.com](mailto:jon@vrhconsulting.com), or telephone, 414-259-9722 or 800-259-1091.

### ***Congratulations to Deborah & Rich!***

*Deborah Lawler, client services manager, and Rich Schmerda recently announced their engagement. A 2003 wedding is planned.*

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**If you would like to receive this newsletter via email contact [deb@vrhconsulting.com](mailto:deb@vrhconsulting.com).  
Previous issues are available at [www.vrhconsulting.com](http://www.vrhconsulting.com). Click on publications.**

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