

Training Mag.com

DPR Construction

By Holly Dolezalek

February 2003

On the first day of DPR Construction's new hire orientation program, each employee completes a DISC personality profile. Consequently, when management puts construction teams together, it considers each employee's personality type and tries to assemble a group that will work well together. It's just one of the ways in which DPR (ranked 60), a 12-year-old commercial building contractor and construction outfit based in Redwood, Calif., is not your ordinary construction company.

The saying "the devil is in the details" could have been coined in the construction industry. Especially in large commercial projects, success or failure hinges on managing an exhausting array of materials, craftspeople, schedules and unexpected developments. DPR manages the details of complex projects—such as the construction of Pixar Animation Studios in Emeryville, Calif., a campus that includes screening rooms, sound rooms, a café, pool hall, and laundry room—by maintaining a solid commitment to thorough and innovative training.

DPR monitors its health and efficiency in terms of six business goals, or critical success factors (CSFs). Careful management of these factors—safety, scheduling, preconstruction excellence, closeout, change management and zero defects—is DPR's route to building well. And all of DPR's training is linked to the CSFs.

Take safety as an example. DPR's goal is to keep all jobs accident-free, avoiding even incidents involving first aid. That's standard in the industry, as is the company's federal- and state-mandated OSHA training. But DPR requires an additional 10 hours of training in OSHA regulations along with a two-hour injury-free environment training course. Depending on their job, employees might also have to train in forklift and heavy equipment safety or in respiratory protection if the job involves asbestos or mold removal.

DPR reinforces safety on the job in two ways: Daily safety meetings take place before anyone enters the job site, and workers inspect the site twice each day. Stephanie Dutton says training is critical, both in avoiding accidents and in recognizing potentially hazardous conditions like frayed electrical cords or unsafe equipment operating procedures. Dutton, DPR's ever forward global learning champion, says

that it obviously works. "DPR's incident rate is one of the lowest rates in the U.S. construction industry," she says.

Each employee is expected to complete 80 hours of training annually, starting with the mandatory three-day best practices orientation. The orientation covers 13 major skill categories, such as estimating, procurement, cost control and scheduling. DPR University offers classes related to these categories, and Dutton's department uses a database to track each employee's training.

When a company offers this much detailed training, it can be hard for employees to know where to start. To address this, DPR created the Wagon Wheel, which evaluates employees on their proficiency in every skill category, or "spoke," covered in the best practices orientation. "It gives you and your manager a visual idea of where you are in DPR," says Dutton. "If you're brand new, it's a road map for what you need to focus on."

Delivering this much training to 2,028 employees in locations across the United States isn't easy. Construction jobs operate on tight schedules, and it takes careful planning and some creativity to make sure that employees have the opportunity to participate in training. Dutton stretches the resources of her four-person training team (Doug Adler, Sam Reid and Mike Humphrey) by enlisting experts in the company to lead DPR classes. Rather than making employees come to them, Dutton's department frequently conducts training at job sites.

Dutton admits that DPR is unorthodox, but she's proud of that. "If we're going to be the kind of company we want to be, training has to be first and foremost," she says. "If we're not keeping up on what's new, what's innovative, what's different, it's not going to work."

DPR's goal is to become one of the most admired companies in America by 2030. If they don't make it, it won't be for lack of training.