

Set Your Objectives and Tell Everyone: How to Align Your Workforce

by Duane Mcbay

At Massilly North America, we make bottle caps. A lot of them. Every year, we produce hundreds of millions of them. Our goal is to increase our production by 35% in a few years. To get there, we've made updates to our machinery and hired staff to allow us to reach that capacity. It's a goal the entire company is working toward.

As the Production Manager, I oversee the day-to-day plant operations. I'm responsible for production itself—activities like machine performance, training, or safety issues. That's my role in helping us get to that milestone of billions of caps.

Over the last nine years that I've been at [Massilly](#), we've changed a lot. We've doubled our team and we've doubled our capacity. We've been able to accomplish that because we got everyone at the company on the same page.

Setting Us Up for Growth

In 2011, the lease at our Mississauga location was expiring and we had outgrown that facility. With the help of Massilly France, we decided to find our own property and made the move to our current space in Brantford. It was a lot bigger than our old space, and now that we had this new facility and big aspirations for growth, we asked ourselves, "Now what?" We needed direction.

My boss, Garnet Lasby, came into contact with [The Emerson Suite](#)'s founder Doug Emerson. He told us about their offering that combined a leadership process with the technology for actually getting it done. We were in a position where we knew we were going to grow quickly, but needed structure to do that.

It Starts at the Top

To achieve complete company alignment, it has to start at the top. That's why once a year, our senior management meets to set out our plan for the year. We decide which areas we need to focus on to be most effective. For example, this year we honed in on safety and operational effectiveness.

Having alignment from the top down means that everyone's on the same page.

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We start with the end goal in mind: for safety, the target is zero days lost to injury. This is a priority not only for productivity, but because we care about our workers. Next, we have to figure out how to get there. That can be accomplished in a lot of different ways: we could introduce a new system or hire a safety coordinator. We think about where we're at now and the steps we need to take to reach our objective. As a result of this exercise, we introduced a behavioral-based training program at our facility to help us reach our zero-day goal.

When we first started these meetings, we threw all sorts of ideas on the board. We were ready to explode with growth and just had to ask ourselves how we were going to handle all of this. We broke it down into the manageable areas of effectiveness.

It's important for businesses to set that end goal, because then you have something guiding your actions. It's a lot easier to chart the path to success by working back from it. Otherwise, people get headed down a rabbit hole they shouldn't go down. From there, we think about our strategic initiatives. How is the market changing and how do we fit into that?

It's so important to have this prioritization set from the top down, because then everyone knows what to work on. Without it, individual team members may set priorities that aren't in alignment with the overall company objectives. Then you have a disconnect of employees not working on the right objectives. You can easily get sidetracked with a project that's going to lead you down a rabbit hole that you don't want to go down. That's where misalignment happens.

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With all of the growth we've experienced, [The Emerson Suite](#) has given us a template to use to keep us focused. **When a company is growing rapidly, a system to keep everyone aligned isn't a nice-to-have; it's vital.**

Weekly Meetings

While these yearly meetings are critical for creating alignment on an annual basis, we meet weekly to ensure our alignment. We do that by using The Emerson Suite's Weekly Top 5 tool. Before, there wasn't much alignment with teams around tasks that were being accomplished each week.

Now, every Friday, our teams come together to talk about our top five priorities for the following week, as well as what was accomplished during the previous week. It's a short

meeting—only about 45-minutes—to get us all on the same page. It also helps identify barriers that prevent us from accomplishing our goals. And if employees are asked to do something out of the ordinary scope of their job, it helps them understand why. It isn't an arbitrary ask—it's because it aligns to the bigger company goals.

Weekly check-ins help facilitate long-term plans. Start doing them NOW.

These meetings give me the opportunity to tell our teams the important areas of focus for the following week and make sure everyone is in agreement. We have these high level priorities for the whole year—which is great—but it's important to stay focused on a weekly basis. It helps us break down these big, yearly initiatives into weekly, manageable chunks. It also helps provide insights to everyone's managers and all the way up to our president on what our team is accomplishing.

It's such a simple tool, but it's effective because it lets everyone understand, very clearly, what we're trying to accomplish. It helps all of our employees prioritize their time and work on the right jobs that will move the needle.

Bridging the Global Divide

Using this system has also helped strengthen our relationship with our headquarters in France. Before using this management system, when we tried to align ourselves with Massilly France, it was tough. We would be heading in our own direction, but sometimes, what we considered our end goal didn't fit in with our headquarter's priorities. Coordinating with local staff is already difficult, and when there's an ocean between you, getting alignment without a defined set of parameters can be near impossible.

Set a goal for your business then work backwards. Don't aimlessly move in a direction you think is right.

With The Emerson Suite, we've been able to give all employees one direction, so that everyone knows what their priorities are. In the past, at our plant here, our objectives might have been around ISO 22000, which means I need to focus on ensuring we are up to speed so that we're ready if there's an audit. But with France, ISO is not a focus, so they're putting their resources behind something else.

Now, we meet once a year with the French group. They understand what we're trying to accomplish here at the plant level and they present what they want to see from their perspective. Then, we agree on the priorities and we're off.

Since we've been able to do this, it's greatly improved our relationship with the French group. It's difficult being so far away from each other, but aligning ourselves from the start means that we don't feel like we're two completely separate teams.

We've Come a Long Way

In order to achieve our mission of producing billions of caps per year, we need structure and focus. We've finally found that.

But probably the biggest reason why we're able to do what we do is because of the people we've hired. Everyone wants to work together and succeed. Now, when we look back each year at what we've accomplished together, it's satisfying. We don't always see that on a day-to-day basis, but looking back over a year's worth of work, we can see the changes. We also have check-ins every three months to make sure that we're on track, but those yearly reviews are where it hits home for us.

I believe every company should be using this model for alignment. If we didn't implement this system, we'd be in a totally different place—and not in a good way. This system has allowed us to bring these incredible people together and get everyone on the same page. Now, there's no stopping us.