



## CASE STUDY

### RETAIL AG LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

#### OPPORTUNITY OVERVIEW

North Iowa Cooperative (NIC) is a regionally focused cooperative in North Central Iowa. NIC has 8 facilities located in four communities and employs approximately 50 full-time employees. NIC has over \$80 million in yearly sales and operates primarily in the fertilizer, agronomy, seed, propane and feed spaces.

#### CLIENT OBJECTIVE

NIC has been a part of the North Central Iowa landscape for decades. Over time they have evolved to meet the changing customer needs and expectations. Recent changes include an investment in a new Agronomy facility, the centralization of services and implementation of technology solutions to manage orders and delivery needs.

North Iowa Cooperative is also committed to helping all of their employees develop. This includes a special focus on helping employees gain the knowledge and skills needed to appropriately demonstrate proper communication when communicating with customers & internal team members as well as emerging leaders become better leaders.

#### TARGET AUDIENCE

- All North Iowa Cooperative employees including management, leaders and operations staff.

#### INTRATRRAIN'S SOLUTION

intratrain partnered with NIC in providing services, products, and expertise designed to create a culture that is "Reaching for Excellence." This is achieved through employee engagement, creating motivated and productive employees with a commitment to enhancing the customer experience and overall customer satisfaction. Improving the quality of employee and customer interactions and their effectiveness improves the customer experience, improves customer loyalty, improves employee job satisfaction, and results in growth of unit sales and margins. The initial three-year plan includes a series of meetings, surveys, workshop, training, and coaching sessions all designed to provide employees with the skills needed to work well together and serve their customers.

#### RESULTS

NIC began year one of the "Reaching for Excellence" program in late 2018-2019 with an employee survey designed to identify strengths and weaknesses related to communication and leadership at NIC. This included both internal communication with co-workers and management as well as external communication that impacts the farmers. Based on the results of that survey, intratrain customized their course "Deliver Great Ag Customer Service" to focus on the key areas of development as identified in the initial employee survey. In addition, all leaders and emerging leaders were trained using the Achieve Results Through Leadership course, learning leadership techniques and skills to resolve conflict, encourage communication, and achieve results. Group training sessions were held for both customer service and leadership with coaching, reinforcement and follow-up opportunities help after the initial training sessions. Additional development opportunities are planned to continue the development in years two, three and beyond.

#### CUSTOMER COMMENTS

We have grain; agronomy, fertilizer and crop protection products (herbicides, fungicides, insecticides), custom application services and seed; propane, and feed. Change occurred in and we needed to find a way to facilitate improved communications between the employees themselves and with their supervisors

What we needed was training for our total employee group. We identified communication as a focus. One thing that came out in our preliminary work was that the external customer—our farmers—were noticing if there were internal issues. We needed to do a better job of presenting ourselves professionally to our farmers. I think we did a great job of mixing up the employees into small groups for the customer service workshops. What I found was that people really opened up and were really good participants. It was very successful, and the employee group thought it was great. We will have a follow-up survey to see if any of the leaders are having any communication problems. That was a big part of making it work.

I would say that I probably waited a bit too long to implement this kind of program. I should have probably done it just a bit quicker. If you feel that there is a need, go ahead and implement a program because it is healthy for the culture of our coop. I think people are doing a better job controlling emotions and bringing issues out in the air, talking things out, working together as a team. We have made great strides compared to a year ago. I discovered I have a great employee group and they want to learn to do better and the Reaching for Excellence program facilitated that.

Chuck Schafer, General Manager  
North Iowa Cooperative.