

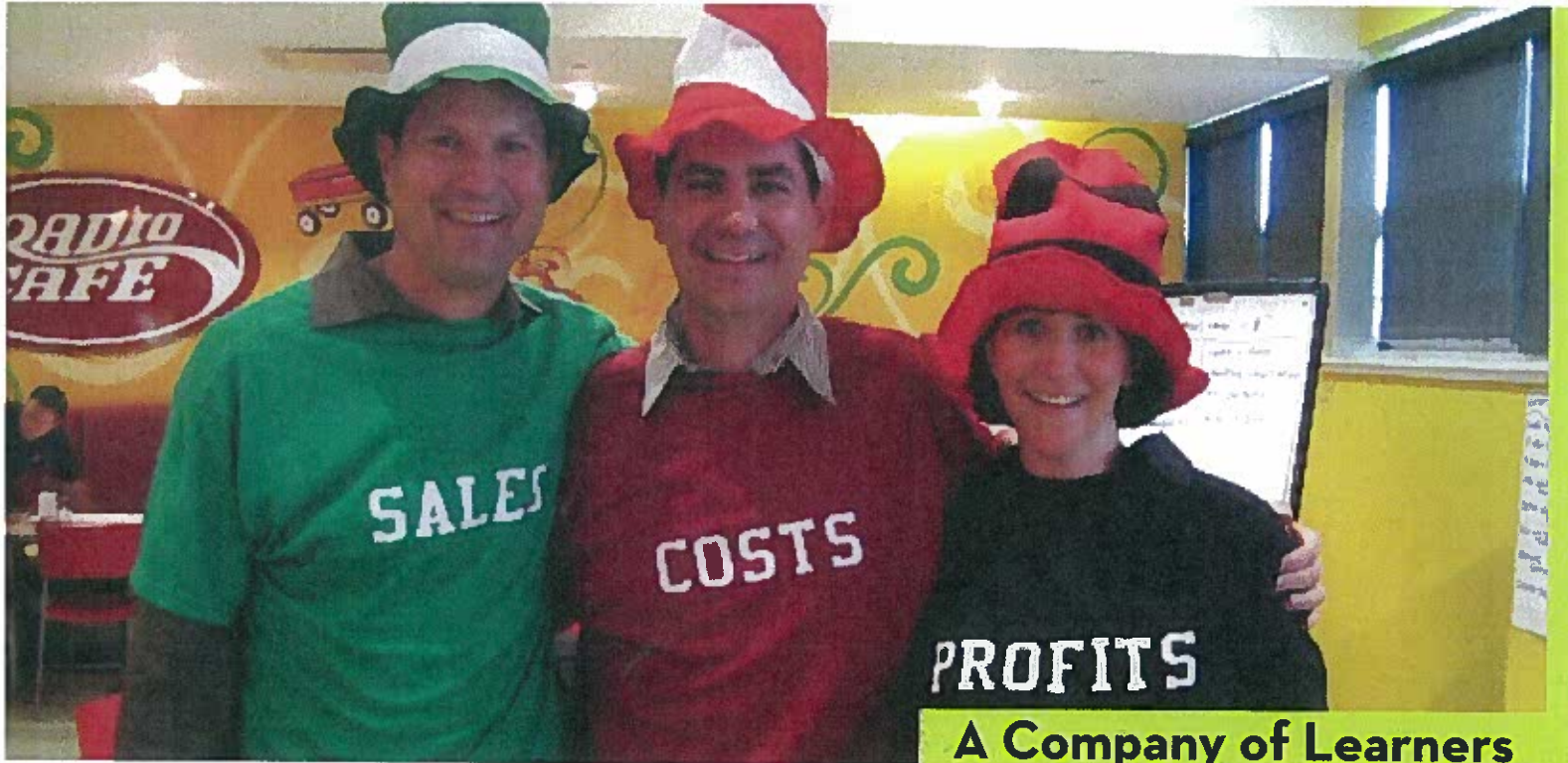
workforceChicago

Business Invested in Learning

Recognizing Companies for Exemplary Practices in Employee Learning and Development

2009 AWARD WINNERS





A Company of Learners



A Modern Classic

In 1917, Antonio Pasin, had a dream to “bring joy to every boy and every girl” with his classic model of wagons and play toys. Pasin gave flight to the red wagon’s brand Radio Flyer, named after two of the most captivating innovations of the era: radio and airplanes, at the 1933 World’s Fair in Chicago, using faith and a bit of financing, with his 45-foot tall “Coaster Boy.” The exhibit of the wagon-riding boy became an icon to the 1933 World’s Fair, and is today a legendary iconic toy around the world.

Ninety-two years later, Robert Pasin, Chief Wagon Officer (CWO) of Radio Flyer in Chicago, is carrying out the dream that his grandfather started. Since 1917, the rapidly increasing buyer demands, industry modernization, and the outsourcing of manufacturing has required Radio Flyer to develop a strategy that was not included in the grandfather’s dream.

A few years ago, Radio Flyer created a cafeteria forum to serve as a magnet for workplace thoughts and ideas, introducing the new Little Red Rule: “Every time we touch people’s lives, they’ll feel great about Radio Flyer.” Each of the 103 members of the Radio Flyer team in Chicago and worldwide applies this Little Red Rule with every interaction with customers, retailers, and manufactures—and with each other.

Today, Radio Flyer is the leading producer of wagons, tricycles, and spring horses in the United States. This accomplishment could not have been possible without CWO Robert Pasin’s commitment to the learning and development of the company’s workforce. It is his personal commitment to learning and development that is driving much of what the corporation is doing. “The investment we’ve made in learning, development and cultural evolution over the past five years has been one of the key ingredients to our success,” says Pasin.

Wagon U: Where it all Comes Together

“We have always kept learning and changing,” said Pasin. He attributes Radio Flyer’s sustained growth to “our desire for discovering ‘what’s next’ and our willingness to try new things, and learn from our mistakes.”

Radio Flyer’s learning strategy was recently formalized as Wagon University (Wagon U). Wagon U currently consists of over 20 courses that are focused in three areas central to Radio Flyer’s vision: Grow Yourself, Grow Your Team, and Grow the Business. “We are all learners and teachers,” said Dorie Blesoff, Dean of Wagon U. “Wagon U is where it all comes together.” Blesoff plays a unique role as an external consultant who partners with Radio Flyer to build and grow Wagon U.

The curriculum integrates technical learning with professional development courses such as Mastering Workflow, Great Presentation Skills, and Stress Management. This model provides opportunities for individual, collaborative, and cross-functional learning. "The mission of Wagon U is to provide learning experiences and tools that help us achieve our Vision, Mission and Values and that build capability for all team members," said Pasin. Wagon U is a growing institution that Pasin and his HR leaders hope to see as an industry model and "a forum for their team members to advance their personal and professional journeys from good to great."

From the Chief Wagon Officer to the newest employee, everyone assesses and sets their professional targets and creates ten individual goals that will drive departmental and corporate goals. "We are strengthening what's good and helping to make more about us GREAT," said Pasin.

There is a spirit of collaboration at Radio Flyer, and individuals at every level contribute to the success of the organization. As part of the overall Human Resources strategy, each year associates create an Individual Career and Development Plan that is reviewed and adjusted quarterly by the associate and their manager. The first goal is always based on personal development with focus on improving two of Radio Flyer's associate core competencies. All Radio Flyer team members and managers participate in a 360 Feedback Survey. The survey is a method of recognizing each team members' effectiveness in demonstrating the 27 core competencies of Radio Flyer. The results are incorporated into the Individual Career and Development Plan. Following the survey, one-to-one coaching sessions are used to assess the results and initiate the strategy for individual career development. With the implementation of Wagon U, Radio Flyer has become "a learning organization in motion," said Amy Bastuga, HR Director. Associates are offered a variety of formal and informal learning opportunities, including information sharing across teams, as well as collaborative and self-study resources.

Creating a Culture of Learning and Authenticity

Since Antonio Pasin formed the company almost a century ago, Radio Flyer has shifted from a paternalistic organization to a workplace of openness and innovation with a strong expectation of feedback. "We want to attract top industrial designers, and they want to have a say in what the company is going to become," Pasin said of the shift. He is committed to advancing his company of learners using two basic equations: 'learning = mistakes' and 'evolving = facing difficult facts'. In the cultural shift, the company focused on becoming more authentic, sharing more financial data, and encouraging, almost demanding, constant feedback. When a major assessment takes place, there is essentially an "autopsy without blame."

Last year's Employee Engagement Survey concluded with 98 percent of employees participating. Radio Flyer had a 97 percent favorable response to feeling valued, which contributed to its success in the Employee Engagement Survey. Radio Flyer strives for 100 percent in all aspects of its business. For example, every associate, across all levels, is currently enrolled in a professional development course. Another example: Pasin personally interviews every potential new employee and participates in and facilitates every new employee orientation program.

Company meetings are held monthly to inform staff about business updates, new team members and upcoming initiatives. Every other month there is a formal company-wide educational session covering a relevant topic such as process improvement tools, conflict management, or driving the economic engine.

Flyer Wheel Teams, cross-functional process improvement teams are employee-driven vehicles that report at company meetings. These topics augment the formal learning of Wagon U and degree programs, yet steer development towards the corporate and individual goals from all angles. Each manager is asked to lead a Flyer Wheel session and each associate is asked to participate in one. At the most informal end of the spectrum, associates organize their own committees that plan breakfasts and lunches to exchange information;

they share resources such as articles, YouTube videos and books to continue their own learning on a variety of lifestyle topics and professional specialties. These include biking in Chicago, reducing carbon emissions, graphic design and product engineering.

The Wagon Ride: From Survival to Greatness

Since Pasin became CWO in 1997, the workplace environment he engineered has produced positive results and gained recognition. Radio Flyer was ranked the #4 mid-size company by "2009 Best Places to Work in Illinois." In 12 years, the company's revenue has quadrupled, to about \$130 million a year. While toy industry sales overall have slumped, Radio Flyer enjoys almost 20 percent annual growth.

When Radio Flyer's metal wagon toys risked becoming obsolete with the increasingly safety conscious families of the 90's and millennium, Robert Pasin introduced the strategy of "facing the difficult facts." The company began in-depth market research, resulting in the transition of product materials from metal to plastic, propelling The Classic Red Wagon to become The Pathfinder.

"The investment we've made in learning, development and cultural evolution over the past five years has been one of the key ingredients to our success."

Since Antonio Pasin's original "little" wagon, Radio Flyer has developed more than 100 award-winning products available in 25 countries, including bicycles, scooters, and ride-on toys, such as the incredibly modern "Cloud 9," called "Wagon 2.0" by CNN's Edge of Discovery. Cloud 9 features a five-point safety harness, padded seats, cup holders, foot brakes, fold-out storage containers, digital handles that track temperature, time, distance, speed, and finally a dock for an MP3 player, complete with speakers. Radio Flyer creates for people nostalgia for its timeless wagons, and hours of pleasure from its innovative new models. Radio Flyer knows that the success of the company is directly connected to the success of its workforce.



Conclusion: From Good to Great

Radio Flyer's Wagon U, informal learning, and tuition reimbursement programs with partners in educational institutions have helped earn the company handsome market share in addition to sustained legacy and popularity.

"Based on Radio Flyer's size, the commitment to and investment in learning and development is unparalleled in my experience," said Dorie Blesoff. All members of Radio Flyer's team demonstrate a commitment to the preservation of the company's legacy and success. With 103 employees worldwide, and only 53 in Chicagoland, workforce size is perhaps the greatest challenge to the company's growth and development. However, with Pasin's motivated leadership and insight, the company is savvy in incorporating external resources, such as Jim Collins' legendary business book *Good to Great*.

Website: www.radioflyer.com

Industry: Consumer Products

Year Founded: 1917

2008 Employees:

Total: 103

Chicago: 53

Location: Operates globally, U.S. headquarters in Chicago, IL

Today, all new associates at Radio Flyer are asked to read *Good to Great*. Some companies might be hesitant to make such a request, but with a company their size, Radio Flyer has to be strategic in its hiring practices. A candidate possessing a willingness to learn and capability for growth will trump a candidate with a stronger composite of technical expertise and established competencies. The technical component is teachable. The attitude is not. Ashley Howell, a new customer service employee at Radio Flyer, observed that before she even finished reading *Good to Great*, she understood the core principles by simply showing up to work at Radio Flyer, where the ideas come to life. Companies, like Radio Flyer, that make the change from good to great do not motivate people. Their people are self-motivated.

Exemplary Learner Profile

Kate Hahn Supply Chain Leader Radio Flyer

When Kate Hahn started two years ago as Radio Flyer's supply chain coordinator, she found the opportunity she was looking for: to venture into new areas of operations management. Kate began her career at Radio Flyer as the Supply Chain Coordinator but quickly advanced to the Supply Chain Project Leader.

Before joining Radio Flyer, Kate worked as a supervisor in a manufacturing facility. She wanted to take the next step in her career, learn the other side of the business, and play a more active role within operations. With Radio Flyer, Kate developed her expertise learning to manage purchasing by working closely with the supply chain team in China.

"I was excited and nervous about my new role," said Kate. "Everyone was very willing to help me learn how to do my job."

Last year, Kate's top personal development goal was to gain supply chain certification through the Association for Operations Management (APICS). She successfully completed two eight-week courses, earned certification, and became a member of the association. Radio Flyer paid full tuition for the courses and membership costs.

Kate's manager encouraged her to pursue the certification and his invaluable mentorship continues to assist Kate in developing her skills in operations and global communications. His mentorship, Kate said, "Has made me much more confident in my job. I'm not afraid to make decisions without going back to get advice."

Kate's certification coursework directly applies to her day-to-day work improving her knowledge in a multitude of operations management functions. "We've streamlined processes," said Kate. For example, they now use imaging systems and innovate data tracking with the China team. "We are saving time and not doing things three or four different ways."

Kate is now focusing on developing a more robust knowledge of the organization through Wagon U course work and hopes to begin working on her project management skills.

"Radio Flyer has helped me create a role for myself that supports the organization," said Kate.

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“More than ever, a uniquely skilled and diverse workforce is necessary to compete in the global economy. Initiatives like WorkforceChicago help ensure that Chicago has the talent and intellectual capital to meet the needs of just about any business or industry so that our city’s future remains bright for generations to come.”

- Mayor Richard M. Daley
City of Chicago

Award Winners 2001 - 2009

WorkforceChicago recognizes these 27 Chicago area companies for their exemplary commitment to the learning and development of their employees.

The logos included are:

- astellas (Leading Light for Life)
- RADIO FLYER
- NorthShore University HealthSystem
- GE Commercial Finance
- Advocate Health Care
- GE
- ERNST & YOUNG (FROM THOUGHT TO FINISH.™)
- TR
- S&C ELECTRIC COMPANY (Specialists in Electric Power Switching and Protection)
- Diamond (Management & Technology Consultants)
- Allstate (You're in good hands.)
- Northwestern Memorial Hospital
- True Value
- gh (GolinHarris)
- IBM
- BANK ONE
- conferenceplus™
- DUNLEE
- accenture (High performance. Delivered.)
- U.S. Cellular
- ARGONNE NATIONAL LABORATORY (UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO)
- BIMBA STAINLESS
- Deloitte.
- Northern Trust
- CAMCRAFT (Precision Machined Components)
- SHOREBANK (Let's change the world.®)
- THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO MEDICAL CENTER (AT THE FOREFRONT OF MEDICINE)
- MOTOROLA