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The Taunton Press

## Taunton Press Implements Fierce to Transform Culture and Improve Performance

### the company

The Taunton Press, located in Newtown, Connecticut, is a niche special interest publishing company committed to providing information that helps people express their creative imaginations. The company publishes magazines, books, DVDs and websites with valuable information and inspiration on home building and design, gardening, woodworking, fiber arts and cooking, with titles such as *Fine Woodworking*, *Fine Homebuilding*, *Fine Cooking*, *Fine Gardening* and *Threads*. The company was founded in 1975 by Paul and Jan Roman and remains a family business, in which everyone shares the core values of integrity, teamwork, excellence, independent thinking, and creativity.

With 250 employees and a large pool of authors who are experts in their craft, Taunton is well positioned to explore new avenues of growth. Each new venture carries with it Taunton's standards: high-value information and inspiration from the experts themselves as well as a strong commitment to the reader.

### the challenge

In early 2007, Taunton's leadership team wanted to help its employees communicate better and have more effective meetings. In the effort to work as teams and allow for everyone's opinions on projects, "we were bogged down by a communications style that led to endless meetings, misunderstandings and less-than-effective teamwork, especially across departments," explained Sue Roman, President.

The company started by evaluating several different training options. One of the members of the Leadership Team had read *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work & in Life, One Conversation at a Time*, so the team pursued the option of utilizing Fierce concepts within the company. Two leadership team members attended a Fierce open session, which led to the decision to move forward.

### Taunton Implements Fierce

#### Internal PR

- Posters around the buildings (at inception of training) to introduce concepts and pique interest
- Fierce information page on company Intranet
- Fierce "person of the month" selected and on the company intranet; recognition forms
- "I was Fierce today" buttons
- Monthly brown bag lunches / coaching sessions

#### Training

- Copies of *Fierce Conversations* available to be checked out from HR
- Two certified trainers
- Continuing Fierce Conversations Workshop training for all full-time and part-time staff members
- Taunton University course on Fierce coaching
- Champions and internal trainers available for employee coaching
- Overview of Fierce Conversations offered at regular intervals for new employees

#### Measurement

- Baseline survey conducted regarding communications at inception of Fierce training
- Check-in surveys every six months

“We chose Fierce because of the way it was presented and the tools it provides in being able to get at a conversation that is meaningful, direct and honest. It was very hands-on and quickly got to the heart of the matter,” commented Carol Marotti, Vice President of Human Resources.

## **the solution**

The company initially trained 70 managers and 18 Fierce champions in a two-day session off site. Taunton was very committed to Fierce concepts and in fundamentally changing company culture; to help drive Fierce’s adoption company-wide, Sue Roman set three goals for Taunton:

- 1) Move to a culture where there is open, honest, respectful communication;
- 2) Design and execute initiatives crisply, with active participation and clear accountability of all involved;
- 3) Have people throughout the company feel energized and empowered to perform with agility.

The Fierce champions received an additional half day of training; in addition, each champion selected a “specialty” within Fierce concepts, on which they would serve as a coach to other employees. The champions were charged with creating and implementing a plan to communicate Fierce to the rest of the company and reinforce the concepts on an ongoing basis.

The champions established three sub-teams to develop a plan for the three key areas needed for ‘Tauntonizing’ Fierce: training, PR, and measurement. As part of the initial plan rollout, members of the Fierce Champions group held a series of employee meetings to explain the commitment as well as the general concepts and goals of Fierce. A benchmark survey of attendees gathered data on employees’ thoughts about communications effectiveness in the company and their early impressions of Fierce.

Taunton also invested in certifying two trainers to deliver training as needed and serve as coaches to the employees. “Even though I don’t have an HR background, I volunteered to be one of the trainers. It has been excellent for my own leadership growth,” commented Peter Badeau, Advertising Director, who is also a Fierce champion and Certified Fierce Trainer.

## **transforming taunton’s culture**

Early on, expectations were set regarding the effect the new conversational approach would have on work and productivity. The PR team worked to generate curiosity and expose employees to the concepts in terms that would be understandable, even to those who hadn’t yet undergone training. Information posted on the company Intranet helped to explain concepts further and contained examples of the conversational models for reference. Monthly emails that highlight an employee who is embodying Fierce concepts in their interactions help people grasp what can be an elusive concept at first.

“All of the activities in the execution plan helped to bring Fierce to the forefront of everyone’s consciousness,” said Carolyn Mandarano, Senior Managing Editor and one of the Fierce champions.

Now two years after the first training sessions, “People are giving frank input more often; it allows for the tougher conversations that they may have avoided in the past. We’re able to tackle tougher challenges and be more nimble. Meetings go better and we accomplish more,” says Marotti.

A survey that Taunton conducted at the inception of the Fierce rollout in spring of 2007, and has repeated every six months since, shows that employees are more satisfied with communications as well. Employee scores have risen

when responding to the statement, “the teams I interact with engage in meaningful debates that result in the best decisions for the company.” Responses to a statement directed at managers, “I clarify responsibilities and raise accountability, ensuring each of my employees has a sense of what is expected,” have risen as well.

The company continues working to ensure that the Fierce approach remains part of conversations every day. Having a plan supported by the commitment of senior management and the champions is critical to its success to date. Moving forward, the company will continue with regular training, brown bag lunches and communications, and is considering adding refresher courses to the training schedule.

“If you’re going to live and breathe Fierce, you have to be consistent and to work harder at good communication, using the Fierce tools. It’s not always easy in the face of changes; sustainability is the key,” concluded Marotti.

### add fierce to your training toolkit

Our diverse, global client list underscores a basic truth: Business is fundamentally an extended conversation—with colleagues, customers and the unknown future emerging around us. Whether your focus is on implementing key initiatives, managing top talent, improving customer acquisition and retention, developing leaders, or simply igniting productive dialogue that generates clarity and impetus for change—success occurs one conversation at a time.

For more information about how Fierce can help your business, visit [www.fierceinc.com](http://www.fierceinc.com) or contact us at 425.283.1294.

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