

How Teamwork Drives Quality

The Schwan Food Company

“Employees take pride in their jobs.” • “We’re all part of the same team.”
“There’s no difference between Schwan’s people and ABM’s people.”

If you talk to the management at Schwan Food Company’s 200,000 square foot facility in Suwanee, Georgia, you’ll hear comments such as these over and over. The operation’s success is attributed to the high quality employees — their training and their attitude. Not surprisingly, the facility experiences low employee turnover because of the mutual respect all around. The culture of trust, equality, and teamwork begins with top management and permeates throughout.

The main activities at this site relate to the shipping and receiving of frozen food products. About 60 percent of the staff are ABM employees (product selectors, truck stackers, forklift drivers, janitors, and a project manager). Even though they handle millions of cases of food per year, their safety record is nearly perfect. And, their damage rate is a mere one percent -- the lowest of all Schwan Food Company’s similar operations.

It Begins With Recruiting

ABM Project Manager (PM) Oscar Suarez knows how to spot people with the right attitude. When he’s interviewing, he encourages applicants to talk about themselves — their experience; why they left their last job; what expectations they have; what are their hobbies, pets, interests, etc. To a great extent, Oscar bases his decision on good character — honesty and sincerity — and his own affinity with the applicant. Likewise, the right applicant recognizes the sincerity of the PM and can sense that Schwan is a good place to work.

Part of the Team from Day One

Oscar introduces new team members to the others, one-on-one or in groups, at break time. He has an open-door policy, and people know they can come to him with any questions or concerns. His office is near the loading dock, and all managers are visible and accessible. Schwan’s General Manager, Jeff Cole, is no exception. He’s been

described as an extraordinary people-person who treats everyone as an equal. Recently, when an ABM forklift operator’s wife had a premature baby, Cole visited them in the hospital. Because he travels a lot, he likes to occasionally hold roundtable discussions. These consist of five employees meeting with him voluntarily to discuss issues and ideas. Once, an ABM employee invented a tool to make wrapping plastic around pallets easier, and that tool is still used.



Safety is an Ongoing Process

Being well versed in safety is important for people who work around freezing temperatures and forklifts. In addition to ABM’s annual safety program and monthly training sessions, the employees get updates and reminders via a daily safety topic presented in the break room. The PM keeps it simple, stressing the important data, giving real world examples that people can relate to, and allowing hands-on demonstrations when possible. If training involves a fire extinguisher, for example, he asks each person to hold it and examine it, so its weight and features are familiar to them. Any time the PM sees confusion in their eyes, he continues explaining until he can see, “I got it” on each face. The training pays off at inspection time: In April 2017, the operation received a 985 out of 1000 in an American Institute of Baking (AIB) safety inspection.

Technology & Manufacturing

Case Study: How Teamwork Drives Quality

Quality is Personal to Employees

Employees understand why quality is important. Management has stressed people like themselves and their children eat the food they handle. Would they want their loved ones eating damaged or contaminated food? The high quality outcomes are attributed to employees staying focused and carefully watching what they are doing at all times. The PM reminds them to stay in the moment, because bringing past or future worries to their jobs will only distract them. Good attitudes and work habits are especially important in this relentless production environment with long hours. However, management tries to respect employees' personal lives, so there is no mandatory overtime. Oscar is on call 24/7, and when he's at work, he continually checks all work areas, making sure all employees are working at the best of their abilities and in the safest manner.



Rewards Encourage Quality

This facility consistently has no “shorts or overs” — there’s always the right number of packages on the pallet. The person who handles the most product is awarded Employee of the Month. Last year, each employee got a \$25 gift card for their zero-accident record, and the PM also received an award for no lost time.

The break room has TVs playing soap operas and game shows — no news programs — so that everyone can enjoy themselves and de-stress. There’s a refrigerator of pizzas for anyone to eat for lunch. There’s also a freezer where cosmetically damaged product is kept, and everyone is allowed to take home a case of pies, pizza, or bread each day. Edible, damaged food used to be thrown away. But, since this practice changed 10 years ago, the amount of damage has decreased each year and is down 65 percent at this location. Schwan is now implementing this perk in other locations.

Replicating The Partnership is Good Business

Schwan recognizes the value ABM brings to their operation. Cole says “ABM’s Director of Bakery Operations, [John Elliott] is absolutely incredible to deal with. No matter what time of day, I can call him and he’ll respond.” Schwan is, therefore, hiring ABM to provide labor for more locations and already seeing the good results.

About ABM

ABM (NYSE: ABM) is a leading provider of facility services in the United States and various international locations. ABM’s comprehensive capabilities include janitorial, electrical & lighting, energy solutions, facilities engineering, HVAC & mechanical, landscape & turf, mission critical solutions and parking, provided through stand-alone or integrated solutions. ABM provides custom facility solutions in urban, suburban and rural areas to properties of all sizes - from schools and commercial buildings to hospitals, data centers, manufacturing plants and airports. ABM Industries Incorporated, which operates through its subsidiaries, was founded in 1909. For more information, visit ABM.com.



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