



MATTHEW KIRCHNER

President/CEO of
America's Best Quality Coatings
kirchner@abqc-usa.com

Then Came the Plant Tour

WHEN IT COMES TO WINNING NEW BUSINESS,
ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

Leslie is the purchasing manager of Stamping America. Coatings Company X had recently submitted an attractive proposal to provide coating services to Stamping America, and Leslie wanted to know more about X

before she transferred any work.

Knowing that a change in supplier would require the confidence and blessing of her company's operations VP and the quality manager, she invited them both along when she made the 30-mile trip to tour X's facility.

Escaping the icy temperatures outside as they stepped through the front door of Coatings Company X, the trio noted that the lobby was clean and well organized. The receptionist greeted them politely with a smile, took their coats and invited them into the company's conference room, which was also neat and adorned with various industry awards and news articles about X. So far so good.

X's staff presented themselves very professionally. After building a bit of rapport by exchanging small talk the group got down to business. X's team had clearly done their homework and understood Stamping America's business. They spoke articulately about X's history, its current management team, product offerings, quality systems, safety programs and customer lists.

It is fair to note that Stamping America's VP and quality manager were skeptical about moving their work. They had been doing business with their current coatings supplier for over a decade. When Leslie's predecessor had moved a small number of jobs to another coater a few years back, the program ended in disaster with the new coater routinely missing deliveries and finally damaging some of Stamping America's parts in the coat-

ing process. That experience had cost Stamping America financially and had adversely influenced their reputation with their largest customer. While X's pricing and willingness to pick up and deliver parts (a service not provided by the current coatings supplier) were attractive, neither was enough to justify awarding the work at the expense of service.

The first impressions of X, though, were positive and encouraging. Stamping America's confidence was building—for now.

Then came the plant tour. As the group stood from the conference table to begin, X's president asked who needed safety glasses. He proceeded to pull pairs, one by one, out of a box, squinting at each in an attempt to find a pair free of smudgy finger prints.

They made their way down the hallway that led to the plant floor. It was well swept and recently painted, but a pair of foam ear plugs, jettisoned by an X employee, lay along one wall. A few coolers, presumably containing staff lunches, were stacked along the other.

The shop floor itself appeared orderly at first glance, and as they walked down the main aisle, Stamping America's quality manager noted that shop floor travelers clearly identified the orders on the floor.

However, the second one he looked at showed an order due date that was two days in the past. While he pondered that discovery the operations VP walked along a production line. He noted that the further he got away from the aisle, the messier were the containment areas below the machines. At the back of the line (an area that wasn't expected by X to be included in the tour), Leslie noticed a pair of dirty cotton work gloves discarded on the floor.

As X's sales manager proudly described the operation of his new powder coat line, Stamping America's team couldn't help but notice a pile of

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rework parts at the unload station that were not identified by any paperwork or tags, and appeared to have collected some dust. The traced shape of a work tool was neatly drawn on a peg board next to the line, perhaps the result of an earlier attempt at 5S. The tool itself leaned against a container of customer product about 5 ft away.

The line employees worked diligently and busily, which would be expected at least while X's President was on the shop floor. But one of them wasn't wearing her company supplied uniform and another was not wearing safety glasses or ear plugs.

While the tour took place, Murphy's Law enacted itself and the production line went down. In an effort to demonstrate his quick response to equipment problems, a member of the maintenance staff climbed to the top of the machine, without any fall protection, and positioned himself precariously above the line as he attempted to diagnose the problem. The tour went on from there, but you get the idea.

Upon the tour's conclusion, X's Sales Manager eloquently summed up all of the reasons that X was the perfect fit for Stamping America. The Stamping America team thanked X for their time, and returned to their vehicle. As tute enough to see past X's attempt to portray its operation as something it was not, they had all concluded that their coatings business was not moving.

The moral of the story is that great coatings operations are built from the ground up, focusing on basics first. Don't just put on a dog and pony show and tell your prospects what they want to hear. Drive what they want to see deep into every aspect of your operation and let the results speak for themselves.



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