Automotive Parts Warehouse: Case Study

PROBLEM

Over a period of five years prior to initiating pre-hire/post-offer Physical Abilities Testing, the Director of Occupational Health for a large organization that warehouses and distributes automobile parts noticed a dramatic increase in strains and sprains and slips, trips, and falls. She also noticed that most of these injuries occurred in employees within the first six months of employment.

As with many other warehouse positions, the job requires a great deal of repetitive lifting. The company had a lifting limit of 50 lbs. and was convinced that none of their employees were lifting more than the official limit. So, they were confused as to why injuries seemed to be mounting – they'd had the same lifting limit for 10 years.

The majority of their injuries were musculoskeletal strains and sprains (especially for the shoulder, elbows, and low back) or slips, trips, and falls. These injuries and the related lost and restricted duty days were affecting productivity, employee morale, and profitability – not to mention employee turnover.

SOLUTION

The Director of Occupational Health Partnered with a local physical therapy clinic to conduct job analysis and develop and implement pre-hire/post-offer Physical Abilities Testing for one of their many locations – as a pilot project. The pilot was successful in decreasing injuries at that single location while the injuries at the other locations soared. The Director of Occupational Health obtained corporate approval to expand the program nationally and approached the local PT clinic to assist with the national expansion. However, the local clinic didn't have the geographical coverage to go beyond a single location.

The local clinic performed ErgoScience testing and suggested that the company reach out to ErgoScience for national program expansion. ErgoScience, specializing in large national testing projects, expanded the testing program to the remaining warehouse locations in collaboration with its large clinic network.

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RESULTS

ErgoScience conducted job analysis in the remaining locations and identified that employees were lifting significantly more than the employer realized. What changed? The size of automobiles had changed, and thus the size and weight of the auto parts. The employer made significant ergonomic modifications and set new lifting restrictions. ErgoScience developed screens that were consistent with the true requirements of the jobs.

Over a period of eight years, ErgoScience tested roughly 90 job applicants per year company-wide. The fail rate averaged 7%. The turn-around time (from request to results) averaged 2.1 days.

The company also initiated return-to-work/fitness-for-duty testing for anyone absent from work for any reason greater than 30 days and for anyone with a musculoskeletal injury or surgery. This testing prevented reinjury after returning to work.

THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF INJURIES PER YEAR

DECREASED BY 89%!

OUR CLIENT REALIZED A NET SAVINGS AT MORE THAN

$2M

FOR EVERY 1% FAIL RATE, DIRECT INJURY COSTS

DECREASED BY 14%

THE AVERAGE INCURRED DIRECT COSTS PER YEAR

DECREASED BY 90%!

CONCLUSION

Overall, this warehousing organization was extremely pleased with the results of its pre-hire and fit-for-duty testing program. They also felt these program results supported their corporate values of caring for their associates and continuous improvement.

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