

Case Study

Jenner Ag

Location: Harristown, Illinois

2015 Revenues: \$72 million

Employees: 83

Industry: Sales & Service

Highlights



Challenge

Jenner Ag originally found the Great Game of Business appealing because the company's profit sharing program had started to feel, to ownership, more like an employee expectation than an earned reward. It seemed employees really didn't understand how the company arrived at the pool of money and what employees needed to contribute to earn their share of it.



Solution

Implement financial literacy training and open the books to the associates and train them on what the numbers mean as a way to create shared accountability. At the same time, introduce a refreshed profit-sharing program as a way to give associates a way to leverage their new knowledge to gain a greater Stake in the Outcome.



Results

After implementing the Great Game of Business, JennerAG saw increases in both revenues and profits – which helped the company to pay out more than \$2.1 million in cash and 401(k) contributions since 2012. But the commodity crash of 2015, which has devastated the farm equipment industry, taught JennerAG's associates the value of opening their books during tough times. "Our focus shifted from making a bonus to saving our jobs," says CEO Steve Jones. "It's easy to wonder where would we be without the Great Game of Business."

"The game motivates the associates on the front lines to stay engaged by laying out what they need to accomplish to meet both their individual goals and the company's."



Jenner Ag, the Case IH Agriculture Application Equipment Distributor for the states of Illinois and Indiana, has been serving its customers for 54 years and counting. While the business, which is a consolidation of four different companies, has been successful over the long haul, it was looking for a system that would get everyone inside the company rowing in the same direction – during good times and bad.

Company Background

The Jenner team began playing the GGOB in earnest back in 2011 and they saw immediate results and year-over-year growth spiked five-fold, from 2% to 10%. Perhaps just as importantly, the agriculture equipment market's slump has hit Jenner and its competitors hard. "2015 may have been one of the most challenging years in the history of Jenner Ag," says Jones. But thanks to playing the GGOB, and integrating the forecasting component of High Involvement Planning, the company continues to adjust to the changing market conditions.

"We have pushed our critical number – sales – to new levels each and every quarter by knowing what was ahead of us and what needed to happen to accomplish that goal."

Playing the Game Together

Everyone at Jenner Sales now actively participates in their financial literacy “boot camp” and uses a range of scorecards, which now encompass both Following the Action and Keeping Score, as a way for the company’s associates to learn more about how they impact the numbers. Jenner has also had great success in rolling out a variety of MiniGames that continue to help break down big issues into small, understandable goals that tie back to improved financial performance. Interestingly, after Jenner acquired another company last year, it opened the books to the people working there. That led to a comment from a longtime manager that: “I had no idea that it took that much to keep the doors open on this place each month.”

To help bolster the open-book culture at Jenner Ag, the team created what they call their “playbook,” which is a set of by-laws and structure that helps the team commit to meeting regularly to review game play elements such as MiniGames, huddles, company meetings and scoreboards.

The discipline of playing the Great Game of Business reaped dividends in different ways for Jenner Ag this past year. Despite the down financial results last year, where associates weren’t able to earn a bonus payment that had become the norm, scores on the company’s annual employee survey remained as high as ever (4.33 out of 5.00). “We lost very few employees, which we attribute to the transparent, fun, winning culture that the Great Game of Business creates,” says Jones. “Employees knew throughout the year how we were doing, so not getting regular payouts or earnings as in the past was understood and not perceived as management hiding something.”

“Though everyone clearly understands that sales is our company’s critical number, they have also learned that managing cash, cost, expenses and ratios are key elements of having full success in business.”

Rapid Financial Results; Lasting Cultural Change

Jenner continues to have great success as its associates continue to become more knowledgeable about how to think and act like owners. The company has also implemented what they call a weekly “Performance Point” scoreboard that tracks a metric of each associate’s choosing that measures how he/she is doing in the job that is then tied to a Stake in the Outcome. As a result, associates have become more accountable and engaged in their work – even during tough economic times.

Thanks to the informed and engaged sales and management team at Jenner Ag, the company was able to grow consolidated sales and income at levels that far exceeded those of the industry. “The Great Game of Business took what was a devastating year for many of our peers or competitors in terms of loss of income, employees and value proposition to customers and allowed Jenner Ag a positive return on sales, sales growth and a strengthened brand in the Illinois and Indiana agriculture industries,” says Jones.

“I never felt more safe. What I mean is that my employees understand the challenges we have on a daily basis. There is no organization out there that is better equipped to survive the challenges we are going through in our industry.”