

Case Study

West Paw Design

Location: Bozeman, MT

2015 Revenues: \$9.5 million

Employees: 72

Industry: Wholesale Products/
Manufacturing

Highlights



Challenge

West Paw Design's founder, Spencer Williams, has long been a proponent of transparency and of sharing decision-making in his business. But when the company suffered financially in 2012, he wanted to find a way to get his employees to understand better how they would each personally impact the bottom line.



Solution

Implement financial literacy training and regular huddles each week to discuss the latest updates to the P&L, cash flow statement, and balance sheet. West Paw Design also implemented a more formal collective decision-making process using High-Involvement Planning and, most recently, a quarterly Gainsharing program.



Results

It has been a steady upward trend for West Paw Design. After losing money in 2012, the company has grown steadily and profitably, ever since it began playing the GGOB.

"I am absolutely more involved and vested in how this company performs compared to any other I have worked for. I feel that I'm part of a team of problem solvers that are in it for more than just a paycheck and that no matter what problem might come along we can all get through it together. And, of course, when things go well we can all celebrate it together!"



West Paw Design is a world-class manufacturer of eco-friendly and high-quality pet toys and beds based in Bozeman, Montana. More than 3,000 pet retailers carry West Paw Design products domestically while exports to some 38 international locations now account for nearly 20% of revenues. West Paw Design has also been a certified B Corp since 2013.

Company Background

Williams was just 23 back in 1996 when he bought an existing small business that made dog and cat toys and turned it into his own, which he renamed West Paw Design. Today, 100% of West Paw Design's products are manufactured in Montana using nontoxic, organic, or recyclable materials and are sold largely through independent retailers.

"People can't make decisions if they don't have all the information."

Playing the Game Together

Since May of 2013, West Paw Design has been relying on the High Involvement Planning process to create their strategic plan, or, as they call it, the “Company Playbook.” The company customized the process somewhat by incorporating popular sports terms like “pre-season,” “training camp” and “regular season” as a way to make the process more approachable and fun. “People help support what they help create,” says Williams. Every May and September, leaders from sales, marketing, finance and operations present their plans to the entire company. They then ask for questions, feedback and ideas for improving the plan. At the end of the meeting a survey is given which measures, among other factors, everyone’s overall confidence in the plan. “We noticed that over the years, our employees have greater knowledge, more questions and greater input,” says Williams. “We like a tough grader. It inspires us to continuously improve our plan and process.” Once the Company Playbook is set, each functional area works with their team to create a “Masterplan” that links to the Company Playbook so that each employee has line of sight to their part in helping achieve the company’s goals. The West Paw Design team also believes in active huddling, where they conduct a series of weekly, bi-weekly, and monthly huddles to ensure that everyone remains on the same page.

“We really do have a glimpse, every month, of how well the entire company is performing. It leaves me feeling more knowledgeable and in-touch with the company as a whole. I appreciate it greatly!”

Rapid Financial Results; Lasting Cultural Change

Since West Paw Design has been playing the GGOB, it has seen fantastic results, especially when it came to finding ways to cut costs and improve efficiency. One of the big drivers of that success has been the multiple MiniGames the company plays to tackle improvements. Those changes, in turn, helped improve the firm’s profitability – especially when compared to the tough times that arrived in 2012. With profits up, and the company’s balance sheet healthy again, West Paw Design set out to implement a profit sharing program with its employees beginning in early 2015. The program was designed by a group of 10 employee volunteers from across the company who set up the guidelines for the program and also led a company-wide training program to help educate their fellow employees of what the new program meant to them and how they would personally benefit by their own contributions to the bottom line. The rollout went smoothly and, with the help of everyone’s contributions, West Paw Design employees hit their goals for the first quarter – earning their first Gainshare payout. “Having Gainshare will help us all stay on the same page of creating real value,” says Williams.

“We are proud to do things in a way where we’re being profitable and benefitting our associates, the community, and the environment.”
