

How to Gain Employee Buy-In for Crane Use

August 2017, By Daryl Lubinsky



Tennant Co. is committed to keeping its workforce healthy. The company's fleet manager, Stuart Olson, along with his team, worked with Spitzlift CEO Michael Spitsbergen to design a crane that would be implemented in the company's fleet as a way to reduce the likelihood of future back injuries. Photo courtesy of Tennant Co.

The fleet department at Tennant Co. used a simple method for allowing its employees a say in which crane they should use to lift batteries in and out of floor cleaning machines. The employees participated in a vote: Green meant yes, and red meant no.

Employee buy-in on the cranes was important to Tennant Co., a global manufacturer of floor cleaning equipment and floor compounds. The company changes many batteries in its customer's cleaning machines. But through the years, an increasing number of Tennant employees who were manually lifting the batteries began reporting back injuries.

"Not because the batteries were so heavy, but the guys were turning and twisting while lifting them," said Stuart Olson, fleet manager for Minneapolis-based Tennant Co.

To help eliminate that problem, the company began using Spitzlift cranes that assisted the employees in lifting the batteries in and out of the mostly walk-behind floor cleaning machines.

The number of back injuries reported in the company has declined, but not as much as Olson would like. Many of the young employees still assume they are strong enough to manually lift the batteries, which weigh between 62 and 80

pounds, he said.

Ergonomic Education

Olson and his team are trying to change that behavior by explaining to the workers that while they might be fine today, their actions might cause chronic back issues in the future.

"Our guys all work remotely. It's not like we get to see them every day. It makes it tougher. If we saw them every day and could enforce it day to day, it would help. But they're all remote, so we don't have that option," said Olson, who has been with the company 14 years and is responsible for all of its 1,050 units in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.

Olson oversees sales and service force vehicles. The majority of the fleet's approximately 500 service vehicles are vans, and for each of those the company adds about \$16,000 in upfitting, including a shelf package, pullout drawers, a gas air compressor, hose reels, and the Spitzlift crane.

Employee Opinion

Olson's department also asks his team for opinions on changes, because he saw they accept the changes more if they have a say in the decision process.

So, when Olson was in the process of choosing between a Spitzlift crane and a crane from another company, he brought the competing cranes in for Tennant safety and service management team members to test.

"It was pretty unanimous which one was the best fit for us," said Olson, referring to Spitzlift.



Olson

The company then brought the Spitzlift crane to its annual service meeting, which most of its approximately 500 service technicians attend. At the service meeting, Olson produces a "tech expo" in which the service representatives look at new products the company is considering.

During the expo, Olson came up with a voting card that included a green "thumbs up" sign or a red "thumbs down" when voting for which crane to use.

"We wanted to make it simple for the guys because we found in the past that if you do a big sheet where they've got to write things down and check things off, they just aren't going to do it," Olson said. The techs simply took the green card or the red card and placed it in a box near the appropriate crane. The Spitzlift crane received about 80% of the vote versus the competitor.

Prior to choosing the Spitzlift 3-foot and 4-foot fold-down aluminum cranes, the company used bumper cranes mounted on the vans, but the technicians complained that they took too long to set up, and the 500-pound cranes were too cumbersome to use. The Spitzlift cranes — a 4-foot model for the Ford Transit and a 3-foot model for the Ford Transit Connect — weigh 37 pounds, which also helps save wear and tear on the vans. In considering crane options, Olson also worked with Auto Truck Group, a truck equipment designer, manufacturer, and installer, to make upfitting changes to accommodate the Spitzlift crane.

Spitzlift CEO Michael Spitsbergen noted that in the current environment in which truck users and builders are going for vehicle weight reduction, they are looking to lighten the load of the vehicle.

He noted Ford's use of aluminum bodies and beds as an example of the light-weighting trend. "Our aluminum fold down crane is portable and can be moved from one application to another because it's so light," said Spitzbergen.

When Olson and his team worked with Spitsbergen and the Spitzlift team on designing the crane for Tennant, Olson requested a lightweight product. It had to be easy to set up and use, and it had to be stowable in a small area because the technicians already use most of the available space in the vans.

Spitzlift sells manual cranes, but Olson decided on a power crane with a 12V motor to make operation even easier for the technicians.

Importance of Staying Safe

Spitsbergen noted that his company is committed to keeping the workforce healthy. Many companies do not concentrate enough on safety until after someone gets injured, he added.

"Where you have a technician with a back injury and he's pulled off his territory, they have to overlap technicians from other territories to pick up his workload," Spitsbergen said. "That causes a ripple effect and stress on other workers, customers, and the company as a whole."

If the technician can't return to the job, the company must bring in someone new and train him, which is costly to the company.

"So it's important to make sure we're doing things right and we're taking care of employees for the longevity of their careers and for the efficiency and productivity to complete the task," he said.

When combining the 40-pound crane with its mounting system, hardware, and wiring, it weighs less than 100 pounds. "We're able to take a crane that weighs 30-40 pounds and pick up 1,000 pounds with it," said Spitsbergen.

Why Complete Company Buy-In is Important

Spitsbergen also receives requests from various companies who reach out to him so they may too prevent injuries from occurring within their organizations with the help of Spitzlift equipment. He and his team will look at the application the requesting company is using and will meet with the company's safety engineer and field engineer.

However, disagreements in corporations can prolong or halt the process of implementing the helpful applications.

"Additionally, over the years I have been involved in dozens of projects that didn't come full circle to implementation because the decision process was not streamlined from the get-go. Company-wide buy-in was not sought, and internal factions have a way of derailing projects. That is another reason why I am a big fan of Stuart's approach," said Spitsbergen.

"Stuart Olson got the buy in," he added. "He wanted buy-in across the board, gave them a chance to choose, and that saves hundreds of thousands of dollars or millions of dollars in equipment that doesn't ever really get utilized."

Olson has also used innovative methods to improve utilization. Last year on the full-size Transit, he introduced a crane extension that mounts on the crane, giving techs another three and a half feet in length.

"Not everyone needs it, but some guys want it," Olson said. "It gives them more room between the machine and the van." He added that he plans on buying more Spitzlift cranes. "They're going in every one of our service vehicles."

Related: [Otis Fleet Replaces Muscle with Machines](#)