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It's Not Racin' It's Performance



What companies can
learn from NASCAR

Illustration provided by PIT Instruction & Training, LLC

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What companies can learn from NASCAR



Many corporate executives looking for ways to make their companies leaner during an economic period of layoffs and higher costs could take some notes from stock car racing. The same methodologies employed by pit crews at NASCAR events can

be applied to many corporate cultures, improving companies' efficiency, productivity, and their bottom line, according to the team at Performance Instruction & Training (PIT).

PIT is the motorsports industry leader in pit crew training and has trained top pit road talent since 2002. But, it's the company's corporate training programs that have won it as much acclaim.

"Motorsports has been very successful," says Breon Klopp, senior director of development at PIT. "Businesses can learn a lot from the racing industry. In these bad economic times, companies that invest in better training and give employees better tools will become both more productive and more profitable."

PIT, located about 30 miles north of Charlotte in Mooresville, trains aspiring pit crew members for NASCAR teams, but also has become an option

for corporate team-building with a focus on the pit crew example. Leaders at approximately 200 companies nationwide, including Intel, United Airlines, and Northrop Grumman, have already discovered that PIT's training program can help them reduce downtime, eliminate waste, standardize the best workplace practices, develop teamwork, and provide a framework for measuring results. Employees from these companies have learned from professional pit crews how to perform multiple tasks using lean concepts that can be adapted to any business.

Pit stops are highly planned and scheduled team-based events that are scrutinized and analyzed to evaluate performance and make modifications for continuous performance. Since 1985, top-ranked NASCAR pit crews have reduced their pit stop times from an average of 29 seconds to 13 seconds. That's a 223 percent improvement in efficiency.

Race teams have achieved these results by refocusing; they are hiring better athletes, giving them the best tools and training, establishing specific job descriptions, setting clear expectations, and carefully analyzing the results. What's more, there has been a culture change that places more value in teamwork and shows more appreciation for a job well done. Klopp maintains businesses can implement similar changes and see similar positive results.



"Too many companies have the wrong people in the wrong jobs," he asserts. "Or their jobs aren't clearly defined or they don't have adequate training or the right tools to do their jobs. These are the specifics we can focus on, using the pit crew model."

The Newest Entrants

In addition to its traditional Pit Crew U and 5 Off 5 On Race Team offerings for pit crew athletes, PIT provides services to an increasingly wide spectrum of clients through its corporate training programs, Lean Performance U and Team Performance U.

These programs can be tailored to meet any corporations' or organizations' needs and objectives. Conceptualized and designed by PIT, these programs relate success in motorsports to successful performance in business and industry. Both programs combine a customized presentation with the excitement and energy of a hands-on pit crew experience to demonstrate the high level performance of over-the-wall pit crews and how businesses can model their organization utilizing similar concepts.

Lean Performance U focuses on improving organizational processes in manufacturing, health care and office environments. Many themes and continuous improvement tools including Six Sigma, 5S, Standardized Work Practices and TPM are introduced and explained utilizing

motorsports analogies from the pit crew perspective.

Team Performance U also addresses the need for and how to improve outcome, but focuses more on the culture challenges of the people within an organization, addressing topics including communication, trust, boundaries, discipline, rewards, and conflict.

"Traditional learning programs for process improvement oftentimes involve complex concepts not easily communicated or made relevant to trade workers, front-line employees, and even supervisors and managers responsible for implementation. The pit stop analogy and hands-on experience of the PIT programs provide clear examples of how employees at every level affect outcome," says Klopp.

Both Lean Performance U and Team Performance U programs are offered to groups of all industries, sizes and goals and half-day, full-day and multiple day programs are available.

Each event is customized beginning with a site visit and a series of conversations to decide how PIT programs can best fit the organization and their goals. Part of the customization is creating pit stop scenarios that reflect challenges within the organization. As corporate participants work through the day's events, they are faced with situations that may actually be occurring at their job site, and through the pit stop scenarios they are expected to experiment with solutions and how to implement effectual change.

Serious Fun

A running theme throughout all PIT programs and the title of PIT's most requested

presentation is "Think Inside the Box." Motorsports athletes perform their very specific roles and responsibilities inside a designated space on the track referred to as the pit box or box. The work they perform inside this box is critical to the outcome of the race and needs to be completed with speed and quality. The idea that businesses would benefit by refocusing on critical tasks, regardless of how seemingly small and insignificant they appear, is not lost on learning and productivity experts.

When PIT received the *Learning Innovation Award* from The Masie Center's Learning Consortium in 2006, it recognized PIT as being on the cutting edge of skill development in the corporate world.

Elliott Maise, chair of the Learning Consortium, commented, "Developing leadership and team work is a critical factor in the success of America's corporations. Giving corporate leaders an opportunity to have the experience of working on a motorsports pit crew with the essentials of speed, communication, skill and collaboration is a breakthrough approach."

The Think Inside the Box program has been highlighted on ABC's *Good Morning America*, CNN, *NBC World News with Brian Williams*, and in publications including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today* and *ESPN Magazine*.

Racing to Improve

PIT has established collaborative partnerships with several improvement organizations to provide expertise in implementing change and ongoing consulting services for long-term gains.

The lean, continuous improvement and team building experts at North Carolina State University's Industrial Extension Service (IES) program have teamed up with PIT to offer regular open enrollment courses at PIT's facility. They now offer both Lean Performance U and Team Performance U programs to clients across the state.

Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) has also signed ➤

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~Elliott Maise
The Learning Consortium





on to the PIT corporate training and pit crew training programs. In June, CPCC began offering the Pit Crew U program to general enrollment students and those within its motorsports curriculum. PIT's corporate training programs, from team building to continuous improvement, are also offered through CPCC's continuing education program.

Consulting companies including Corporate-Quest, Rich Campe International and Strategic Work Systems offer PIT programs to clients in their respective industries including financial services, construction, and others.

Northrop Grumman Ship Building in Newport News, Va., sent 450 employees, deck plate mechanics to mid level managers, to the PIT training facility in Mooresville. Billy Wright, a production manager at the facility, accompanied the groups, who were divided among seven trips.

"It was truly rewarding to see the light bulbs coming on as our employees participated in the PIT program's pit stop scenarios," attests Wright. "They saw how their work performance affects the next person in line or their peers, why continuous improvement is a must to maintain competitive advantage in the workplace, and that production improves by becoming more efficient—not by going faster."

The PIT programs are also mobile. PIT transported part of its operation to Chandler, Ariz., so 1,300 employees who perform preventative maintenance on computer chip-producing equipment at Intel could partake in the hands-on pit program.

And the variety of industry applications are endless. United Airlines sent 45 ramp supervisors to PIT for training each week for 40 weeks, in hopes of cutting the time that United's 455 jetliners spend on the ground. United Pacific hired PIT to help staff save time and boost the railroad's capacity without having to invest millions on new track. Blue Ridge Paper in Waynesville decided to implement a new program with a proactive approach to equipment maintenance and process improvement, and sent its maintenance and production managers to Mooresville for a week-long training seminar.

"We offer a unique adventure," says the engaging Klopp. "We provide a very attractive, fun, sexy event, which provides easy to understand, tangible results."

The PIT Crew

Performance Instruction & Training (PIT) is the result of several talented individuals coming together and bringing varied and complementary backgrounds with them.

Klopp has always been involved in sport medicine and fitness. He got caught up in the fitness wave that hit NASCAR in the mid-'90s when it began hiring athletes from other fields for pit crew teams.

In 2000 Klopp was involved with the founding of a new company, 5 Off 5 On Race Team Performance, located on Gasoline Alley in Mooresville, providing pit crew training and a practice facility. In April 2003, the company joined forces with Tom DeLoach and Jeff Hammond, and 5 Off 5 On became an active program within PIT.

Tom DeLoach, a retired CFO from Mobil Corporation, was a partner, then a consultant, with Penske Racing's NASCAR Winston Cup teams, from 2000 to 2003. He is currently vice chairman of the Georgia Tech Chemical and Bimolecular Engineer Advisory Board, a Director of Liberty Property Trust, and is the managing partner for PIT.

Charlotte native Jeff Hammond has been involved in NASCAR for over thirty years as a crew member, crew chief and team owner. Hammond's career includes 43 race wins, seven Winston Cup Championships, and an Emmy nomination as a broadcaster for Fox Sports. One of the best motivational speakers from the world of NASCAR, Hammond is a partner in PIT.

Klopp heads up the operational activities of the various programs as senior director of development. During his tenure, in 2004, PIT built a new headquarters on five and a half acres in Talbert Business Park in Mooresville. The 32,000-square-foot facility includes a quarter mile approach practice track with six pit stalls, a complete fitness conditioning center with physical therapy and medical services, small and large meeting facilities including a multi-use large screen presentation theater, a dining room and catering kitchen.


Lean Training in a Lean Economy

In today's economic climate, companies are making the most with the least. Many companies are cutting or freezing the training budgets, but Klopp argues that this is the best time to take advantage of improving your company.

"Businesses generally do not concern themselves with details when everything is going well," Klopp says. "When businesses become lean they start paying attention to everything because when percentages are down everything is important."

"The first things that companies look for when times are bad is not how to improve the way they do things, but how they can reduce costs, which are two different things," Klopp explains. "When businesses simply try to reduce costs that's where we see layoffs. But, if they improved their processes to become more efficient and effective, they could utilize their processes and systems instead."

PIT believes that for businesses to make the most of what they currently have they need to concentrate on how to capitalize on the opportunity to reduce waste in even the smallest ways. Improving processes increases the bottom line.

Companies are operating with fewer employees, so each one is more important than ever. Investing in their efficiency will assure their utilization during the upturn and increase morale and work ethic. 

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