

Shure Incorporated Communication: Top Priority at This Sound Company!

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From radio parts wholesaler, to global leader in audio electronics, to being named one of Chicago's 101 Best and Brightest Companies to Work For, Shure Incorporated has made its mark in the business of sound—and the business of business.

Founded in 1925 by Sidney N. Shure, as a company selling radio parts kits before factory-built sets were made, Shure Incorporated has evolved, grown, and endured through its 82-year history. In fact, its 40-year-old SM58 microphone remains the most popular microphone in the world today. But microphones are only one of many products in Shure's repertoire. The rest include: wireless microphones and wireless guitar systems, digital signal processors and feedback eliminators, personal monitor systems, Hi-Fi phono cartridges and DJ needles, portable mixers and digital signal processors, sound isolating earphones and portable audio electronics. "Without the desire of so many to have their unique voices heard, there would be no Shure Incorporated," reads

Shure's Web site. It is fitting, then, that MRA took the opportunity to listen to Michelle Gibour, Senior Human Resources Representative at Shure's manufacturing facility in Wheeling, Illinois, tell how it is equally important, that despite their incredibly diverse workforce, how Shure manages to ensure those voices are heard loud and clear.

"With a big, diverse workforce—Vietnamese, Asian, Hispanic, African-American, Polish, Caucasian and Indian, just to name a few," shares Gibour, "the two biggest challenges are the language barrier and how to promote communication." Shure actively and continuously addresses both. To help bridge the language gap, Shure offers English as a Second Language classes for associates. This helps, says Gibour, but knowing the language and understanding the communication can be two separate things. So, in addition to learning the language, the managers and supervisors need to learn the individual. Gibour explains, "[An associate] may nod his head and say he understands, but you can tell, because you know that person, that maybe he or she does not understand. It takes time and effort to phrase [the communication] a particular way, even peer to peer." Shure's goals for communication are admirable. They go beyond associates simply understanding how to do their jobs and following rules. States Gibour, "Our goal for

communication beyond the language barrier is that associates really understand what is going on with the company."

One way that Shure associates are kept abreast of company happenings is with what they call their Level Meetings. Level 1 meetings take place daily among supervisors and production associates right on the production floor, for 10 to 30 minutes, depending on the need for that particular day. Supervisors lead the meetings but always address associates' questions and comments. As a result of these meetings, supervisors can get to know how production associates are feeling. Level 2 meetings are held weekly with the supervisors, and Level 3 meetings, also held once a week, are an opportunity for the management team to discuss what is new and what is occurring within the plant. Because of the constant flow of meetings at all levels, Gibour contends, "Anyone can get a message to management." Gibour has found that "In manufacturing, you need to have constant communication. Associates want to be part of the process. [Because of the meetings], associates are aware of things going on. It is a big help and a big success."

It is not hard to support communication efforts at the plant level at Shure, because communication is made a priority in both word and deed, starting at the top. For example, Shure president Santo (Sandy) LaMantia holds a "Breakfast with the President" twice a year. The meeting is kicked off with a particular question, but

then opens up to those in attendance. “Sandy is very good [at] and committed to communication. Even information that is not directly [related to] manufacturing is well communicated. Top management spends time with associates through plant visits. This helps everyone to feel that the individuals [in top management] are approachable. That is one of the best things about Shure; everyone is approachable. Sandy, the vice presidents, Mrs. Shure [Shure Incorporated Chairman of the Board], and top management executive leaders are involved; that is appreciated [by the Associates].”

LaMantia facilitates Town Hall Meetings where executives, including Sandy, speaks to all the associates about changes in the business, and he sends a Letter From the President each month to associates’ homes discussing company activities, covering everything from company business to pandemic preparedness. And if that weren’t enough, there are informational workshops which are a continued effort through the company’s Legendary to Visionary goals of communication. These informal sessions are led by someone from a department at headquarters—for example, engineering or personal audio—and a specific topic, such as how the product gets to the customer or new product open houses, are just some examples of the continued effort of keeping associates informed.

In addition, the plant manager at the Wheeling facility hosts a quarterly lunch with associates. The lunch is open to any topic. Gibour states, “We get a lot of questions specific to Wheeling. If the question cannot be answered during the

lunch, we find the answer. I take detailed notes at these meetings and post the details on the Lunch With the Plant Manager bulletin board.” Gibour explains why—“If one person has that question, there are probably others who have the same question. This way, everyone can benefit from the lunches, not just those who attend.”

Another channel associates have for communication is Shure’s “Speak UP” program, in which anyone can submit a question, concern, or even an accolade, by jotting it down and placing it in the “Speak UP” box, located at the time clock. The Human Resources department then reviews the “Speak UP” submissions and gets back to the associate directly with a response. “Speak UP”, and any subsequent actions, are also shared with Mrs. Shure, LaMantia, and the Vice President of HR, which helps them keep a finger on the pulse of manufacturing. As a complement to the “Speak UP” program, improvement suggestions can be made through Shure’s Continuous Improvement Program, CIP. Suggestions made through CIP are taken to the CIP committee members for review. States Gibour, “The best way to hear of an improvement is from our associates who live and breathe it.”

Even with all these communication vehicles in place, Shure continues to look at improving communication. So when, on a recent employee opinion survey, associates asked for some peer-to-peer communication tools, Shure stepped up with training for all associates throughout the Wheeling plant. Gibour explains, “It was a

Wheeling initiative. We felt that there was an opportunity to give associates the skills to improve [communication].” Shure’s manufacturing associates attended the four-hour MRA communication training not at the manufacturing facility in Wheeling, but at the corporate office in Niles, 12 miles away. Gibour explains that taking associates to the corporate office, to give them tools they had requested, truly made the associates feel valued. “We got very, very positive feedback from the associates,” shares Gibour. The training was reinforced as an agenda item at all the Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 meetings, and continues to be reinforced with poster-sized boards displaying key information from the training.

Rest assured, even with so many roads of communication in place at Shure, improvements are not stopping any time soon. According to Gibour, “Communication is an overall continuous effort on Shure’s part. I have worked for a number [of companies] at the corporate level where people don’t know what’s what. I have found that [sharing] information plays a big part in people’s understanding and being happy in their role.” And that is a message that can be heard loud and clear at Shure.