

Case Study

Maple Reinders Group



“Trying to describe the Gridexperience to someone who hasn’t been to a seminar is a lot like trying to explain to a new father what fatherhood will be like,” **Bert Hofland**, HR Manager for Maple Reinders Group in Toronto, explained in a recent interview. “You have to experience it yourself to understand.”

“I can remember **Gavin [Robinson]** explaining the experience to me in early meetings with him,” Hofland recalled. “I heard what he was saying, but thought ‘this program is just like all the others—where you basically sit back, listen, and learn.’ Then I experienced it myself, and realized how different it is, and found myself trying to explain it to senior managers and staff who had not yet had the experience.”

Maple Reinders is a full service design/build construction group involved in a wide array of projects across Canada. They operate six offices across Canada with their headquarters in Brampton, Ontario (greater Toronto area). Maple employs 200 people; this includes a mix of salaried personnel and hourly, unionized laborers. The 37-year old company is privately owned with the founder, **Fred J. Reinders**, serving as Chairman of the Board and his son, **Mike R. Reinders**, serving as president and CEO.

Maple’s Heavy Civil divisions specialize in water and wastewater treatment facilities. They served as the prime proponent in a landmark Design/Build/Operate project for a \$16 million wastewater treatment plant upgrade in Banff, Alberta. The design and construction phase was completed on schedule (within 18 months) and on budget. Because Banff is located in a National Park, the upgraded plant was designed under stringent environmental constraints, and now has some of the lowest discharge targets in North America. “This kind of track record has given us a pre-qualifying status for many of the large scale projects that we bid on,” Hofland commented.

Maple Reinders began undertaking major change three years ago when their nine-figure revenues doubled in less than two years. “We experienced a period of dramatic growth and in trying to keep up with the new work, we ran into problems. We realized after that period that we needed controlled growth. Grid is very timely for incorporating this new growth the right way, by building a culture that supports our mission and vision.

“There is a lot of common sense and logic in Grid, and it’s amazing how important common sense and logic are for successful business,” Hofland explained. “You have to be aware of the common sense and logic available and practice using it on a daily basis to succeed. Grid provides a way to do that.

“When I first came to the company in 2001, we had a saying of, ‘The Maple Way.’ When I started asking people what ‘The Maple Way’ meant to them, ten people would give me ten different answers. We want people to have a very clear understanding of what that term means. Now people are beginning to speak with more common understanding. They’re also starting to say things like, ‘That meeting wasn’t very 9,9 was it?’ Part of carrying this forward for me is to explore ways to test whether or not our actions are ‘The Maple Way.’

“We also value Grid because its message is as valuable for home and family as it is for business. Family is always an important part when considering any learning. Grid concepts are as applicable at home as they are at work. People spend 80 percent of their day working, so they need to be happy, rewarded, and fulfilled.”



In the last three years, all senior managers at Maple Reinders have attended public Leadership Grid Seminars, followed by the 12 senior managers completing a Building Maple Reinders Group Maple Reinders Group 2 Spectacular Teams Seminar and 75 staff members completing GridWorks seminars. “When I came on board, about half of the senior managers had completed Grid seminars, but the balance of them—including the president of the company—had not yet attended. The problem with the remaining leaders attend-

ing was scheduling; finding four days for a very busy senior manager to attend was a real challenge. But, we were also beginning to see problems, so we stepped back and looked at what we really wanted from Grid. That's when we decided to take the commitment all the way. We believed strongly that any effort had to be top-led, and that meant finding the time to attend."

Recalling the BST Seminar experience, Hofland said, "We completed the three days but never made it through the Model Project Activity. Looking back, though, not completing that activity worked to our advantage. We agreed to meet again to tackle that activity during our 3- day Senior Management meeting, and we took a whole day to do it. There was still confrontation, but the confrontation was in Grid terms now—people attacked issues, not people. That second meeting and activity led to us developing a very clear template for all business units to use in making an annual business plan that will assist in developing a national corporate strategy. This template was also presented to and endorsed by our Supervisory Board, which is a collection of seasoned business leaders from throughout Canada and Europe and chaired by our founder, Fred J. Reinders."

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Another benefit of the BST Seminar was that the experience added focus for the top team. "Before that seminar," Hofland recalled, "the group met two times per year, but with no real focus other than gathering and sharing information. Now we have increased focus and commitment to hold each other accountable in achieving corporate goals."

Hofland also completed a Manager Preparation Seminar this year. "The MP seminar demonstrated the commitment of the company leaders to seeing Grid through. Next year we want to look at running TeamWorks with actual unit teams so that teams at all levels can experience team building. We are exploring the feasibility of running GridWorks seminars with our unionized field construction workers in the coming year. Some of these union workers have been with the company for

20 years or more and are an integral part of the organization. I think it's important to have everyone on the same page, speaking the same language, if you really want to create a unified culture."

Measurement (return on investment!) is also a fundamental concern for Hofland, and other company leaders. "I am meeting with Gavin this week to work on a strategy for measuring the change and the effectiveness of Grid."

"I think it [Grid] can be very effective if the company follows through with the skills. When I took the MP seminar with Bruce Carlson running the Leadership Grid Seminar, we critiqued one of his PowerPoint presentations. He listened to the critique and took a few slides out as a result. That's what it's all about. You take it in, modify what you're doing, and you go on. It's a matter of continually renewing yourself as an individual, a team, and as a company or you'll be left behind. We use Grid as a platform to do this."

When asked what Maple's goals are, Hofland said, "We've been involved in multi-million dollar building projects but, for example, we still want to build that high end, 50-million dollar bank building. Integrating Grid concepts and aligning these with Maple's mission and vision is a way to get to that dream. If we set this vision in place now, we can accomplish it in 3-4 years."

When asked how Grid will help take them there, Hofland said, "We're on the road with a good start. The proof will be in how we use it. At the end of the second GridWorks session, one of the participants asked 'How do we keep this alive?' Management has given the employees the tools and initial skills. We now need to set an example as leaders of the company in our daily interactions with staff by using candor and allowing objective critique to guide our decision-making. In his welcoming address to both GridWorks sessions for the employees, the President and CEO, Mike Reinders, made a clear commitment that employees will not be 'punished' for being candid; nevertheless it's still a scary, risky venture for people that requires practice. The challenge for management is to create an atmosphere of openness that fosters a sense of urgency and mutual accountability and where employees want to be involved in changes that will drive the business forward. It's an exciting road that leads us all to 'practice what we preach' and to truly live up to the standard of: 'Integrity in Building Excellence'." ■