



For LAAAJA Colleagues There's No Limit To The Challenge Of 'How High Is Up'

A highly effective system for generating innovative thinking is helping LAAAJA colleagues come up with bold business-accelerating ideas that translate into double-digit growth projections through much of the rest of the decade.

10.11.05 MORRIS PLAINS – A profound shift in attitude among LAAAJA colleagues to collaborative thinking, idea-generation and cooperation is helping the whole region grow faster and contribute significantly to PCH's overall growth goals.

Helping to free LAAAJA colleagues to focus on just how fast they want their region to grow and how big they want it to become is a series of intensive three-day group sessions first held last summer and repeated again this spring.

Created by a prominent university professor, Min Basadur – generally recognized as the “father” of innovative thinking – the sessions use a variety of scenarios and tools to help unleash creative ideas that can spur growth.

“Min Basadur is generally recognized as the premier developer and practitioner of on-the-job applied creativity skills within organizations,” say Ian Brookes, senior marketing director for the region. “We turned to him early last year when we began to redefine our business at the divisional level following the Pharmacia acquisition and ask ourselves ‘how high is up?’ in our thinking.”

Brookes explains that the decision was to move away from an incremental growth approach to the business to a focus on “asking ourselves where we wanted to be in five years or how many times bigger we wanted to be and then work back from that to try to think of some big ideas that would help us get to that big target.”

Current projections through 2007 show LAAAJA's already robust net sales performance growing at a compound annual rate of 21 percent and income before taxes (IBT) growing at a 25-percent rate. The region's latest estimate for 2004 net sales shows an approximately 31 percent growth over 2003, with IBT improving by about 21 percent.

The sessions, run by Basadur himself, often generated hundreds of ideas, which were then winnowed down to perhaps a dozen for intensive debate and identification as action items.

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The sessions also helped colleagues understand the different individual approaches to idea-generating and problem-solving -- such as "blue sky" thinking and practical implementation -- and the importance of participating in all elements of the process.

The sessions have prompted more than just solid business-building ideas, Brookes notes. "They've also enabled LAAAJA colleagues to think more freely and creatively overall, to work more cooperatively throughout the region, and to share challenges and opportunities that can help their individual businesses and the region as a whole grow better and faster."

Despite some initial reservations, Brookes reports, LAAAJA colleagues have embraced the Basadur system and their new way of thinking, shifting from a focus on incremental growth to concentrating on the big picture of where they want the business to be in the long term."

"The process has essentially been institutionalized within LAAAJA and the sub-regions are adapting it to their own planning processes," Brookes notes. "Even some of the language and expressions used during the sessions have found their way into daily colleague conversations."

Claus Egstrand, LAAAJA senior vice president and a member of the Consumer Healthcare Leadership Team, credits the applied creativity exercises with "helping us achieve a higher level of aspiration for the region, and that's reflected in the attitude of colleagues."

"They're pushing the boundaries and looking for opportunities that may entail significant degrees of risk," Egstrand notes. "Whereas before they may have held back, they now feel especially comfortable expressing their ideas."