

# Up, Up and Away with Growth at Chrysler

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In April, Mike Stern, CEO of Chrysler Industrial Corporation in Elmwood Park, NJ, took his team to Doug Hall's Eureka! Ranch to develop ideas for growth. Recently the New Jersey MEP talked with Mike about how this program has changed his company.

Chrysler was started in 1914 by Mike's great-grandfather. Initially the company was located in NYC and made fine jewelry for upscale jewelry and department stores. During World War II, Chrysler began manufacturing parts for cathode ray tubes and various war-related products including aircraft tube and manifold assemblies. Now that is their primary business with customers like Pratt & Whitney, Honeywell, and Siemens. Chrysler is a public company (KRSI) with two subsidiaries, Chrysler Industrial in Elmwood Park and Chrysler Polska in Krakow, Poland.

New Jersey MEP's interview with Mike follows:

## **Mike, what prompted you to attend the Eureka! Winning Ways (E!WW) seminar?**

Chrysler has been improving its manufacturing operations for several years and has opened up capacity through productivity improvements. However, we are much better at making parts than marketing them and we felt the Eureka! Ranch would help "jump start our brains" to think more like marketers than manufacturers.

## **How would you define the E!WW program?**

As a manufacturer we are enamored with the features of our products. E!WW is a disciplined methodology to develop new ideas to sell more products. Doug Hall teaches you to focus on the benefits to the customer, not the features of the product.

## **Did the program result in 50 or more choices for growth?**

Yes, to our surprise, we identified 82 possible choices for growth. It was a two-day process. The first day Doug needed to change the way we thought about growth and the second day we brainstormed from a new perspective.

## **Did the E!WW program result in an action plan to turn two of your ideas into reality?**

Yes. The first idea was to leverage our expertise in tooling. Normal lead-time for our product is 8 to 16 weeks. We realized through our discussions that we could actually produce the part in 10 days. Since returning from the Ranch just seven weeks ago, we have produced a prototype and have received two orders for our "10-day tube" at a premium price.

The second idea was completely outside of our current market. We are now in the “Discovery Phase” with a new product line where we are working with a patent holder to manufacture his product.

### **How long did the action plan development process take?**

The action plan is a quick process. Finding the time to implement the action plan while dealing with the day-to-day issues is the hard part. It needs to become a priority in order to be successful. In the case of the 10-day tube, we identified the product for trial within 2 days of returning from the Ranch and ten days later we had our prototype.

### **Who from your company participated in the E!WW program?**

The management team, including sales, purchasing, and manufacturing. We also had an outside sales rep and outside director participate. The program was very well received. Everyone on the team recognized the need to diversify our product and customer base. E!WW provides the roadmap. It’s also a great team building exercise.

### **What did you learn from the E!WW experience?**

Our thinking is the barrier to our future growth. We can talk ourselves out of any idea, but E!WW teaches you to trust your intuition and explore new ideas. If an idea isn’t strong, the E!WW process will help you figure it out quickly before you waste a lot of time and money. We have been making the same product for over sixty years. This experience gives us the courage to try something new!

### **Have you observed any changes in your team since the program?**

Yes. All of us are aligned toward the same goal. There has been an increase in involvement by many employees and greater support for new product development. I would have to add that one of the most important results from our experience with E!WW is the increased confidence by the team to pursue crazy ideas.

### **What are the next steps for you? Will you continue to use the E!WW process in the future?**

Once we absorb the current ideas and try to make them successful, we will start the process again and brainstorm new ideas to explore. We feel like we have learned enough to try the idea generation ourselves, although we may need some coaching. Once the ideas are generated, we can still send them back to Eureka! Ranch for validation. As far as I’m concerned, if we can develop a new business concept every four months using the E!WW process, the project has been a success.

**What would you say to other CEO's who are considering going through E!WW?**

If your company has been selling the same product for a long time and new product development is limited, this can be a helpful tool to jump start everyone's thinking. Create a cross-functional team from all levels of the organization and encourage the team to dream big.

**If other companies want to talk with you about your experience in the E!WW program, how can they reach you?**

They can feel free to call me at 201-693-9201 or e-mail me at [mdstern@krisler-ind.com](mailto:mdstern@krisler-ind.com)

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