

Case Study

Work Release

ACO

Overview

ACO is a proud Australian manufacturer and part of the global ACO Group, a family-owned multinational enterprise with over 5,400 employees across 50 countries. With its headquarters in Emu Plains, Sydney, ACO designs and produces high-quality stormwater drainage systems, building drainage, cable pits and ducting systems, and access covers tailored to Australian standards.

ACO's commitment to local manufacturing is matched by its dedication to innovation, quality, and customer support. As a market leader, ACO leverages global R&D capabilities while maintaining rigorous local testing and compliance through its ISO 9001-certified systems.

Workforce Challenge

In recent years, ACO faced a growing challenge familiar to many manufacturers: securing a reliable and motivated workforce. Despite offering competitive roles and investing in recruitment efforts, the company struggled to find candidates who could consistently meet the demands of production, particularly in terms of attendance, attitude, and adaptability. This workforce gap threatened not only operational efficiency but also team morale and long-term growth. ACO needed a solution that went beyond traditional hiring methods.



Key project benefits



Addressed labour shortage with a motivated workforce



Fostered a more inclusive culture



Social impact has become a point of pride within the team



Exploring a new path

ACO decided to explore a partnership with Corrective Services NSW through the Work Release program, which allows eligible inmates to work in the community while serving their sentence. Initially, the idea was met with understandable hesitation from staff. To address concerns, ACO conducted toolbox talks and open forums to explain the program, its safeguards, and the potential benefits. Once implemented, the program quickly proved its value.

Transformational outcomes

The impact of the Work Release program has been both operational and cultural:

1. Reliable and motivated workforce

Participants consistently demonstrated:

- Punctuality and reliability
- A strong desire to learn and contribute
- Respect for the opportunity and their colleagues

Their performance often exceeded that of external candidates, leading ACO to prioritise hiring people in custody for certain roles even when they lacked formal qualifications because of their standout attitudes and values.

2. Positive cultural shift

The presence of Work Release participants fostered a more inclusive and respectful workplace. Team members appreciated their humility and work ethic, and participants were quickly embraced as part of the crew. This mutual respect strengthened team cohesion and morale.

3. Seamless coordination

ACO praised the Work Readiness team at Corrective Services NSW for its responsiveness and support. Scheduling, communication, and logistics were handled smoothly, making the program easy to manage and integrate into daily operations.

4. Social responsibility and impact

Beyond business benefits, ACO recognised the deeper value of the program: helping individuals rebuild their lives. By offering real work experience, ACO contributed to participants' rehabilitation and reintegration, giving them a sense of purpose and a pathway forward.

This alignment of business needs with social impact has become a point of pride for the company.

Conclusion

ACO's engagement with the Work Release program is a compelling example of how innovative thinking can solve workforce challenges while delivering meaningful social outcomes. The program has provided ACO with dependable workers, enhanced team culture, and allowed the company to play a role in supporting second chances.

This initiative embodies ACO's core values, Team First, Ownership, and Positive, and shows that when businesses think locally and act with intention, they can create solutions that benefit everyone.

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