

PEER COUNCIL ACTS AS A VALUABLE SOUNDING BOARD FOR
IDEAS

ABOUT RAPAT CORP. Rapat Corporation is a manufacturer of material handling equipment based in Hawley, Minnesota. They create customized solutions for transporting bulk materials for industrial and agricultural customers, with products including structural steel trussed, structural steel channel, and enclosed frame belt conveyors, bucket elevators, corrugated sidewall belt conveyors, chain conveyors, and distributors. Their conveyor products assist in moving materials such as woody biomass, pellets, mined limestone and fly ash, frac sand, and sugar beets, among many others. Rapat Corporation collaborates with clients to design and build exactly the equipment needed for the specific job and location, aiming to get the right solution on the first attempt. This family-owned company, with 75 employees, operates from a single facility and has been in business for 52 years.

THE CHALLENGE. In 2010, Todd Sparrow was serving as General Manager at Rapat and was seeking to enhance his skills as a manager and leader within the company. When speaking with his local Enterprise Minnesota business advisor, it was suggested that Todd join a Peer Council to learn from other manufacturing leaders facing similar challenges. After getting to know the group, he became a member and has been actively participating ever since. Todd has since advanced to a senior leadership role at Rapat Corporation, where he now serves as president.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. Todd remains involved and invested in his local Peer Council because it provides a place for answering questions. It doesn't matter the industry the members are in, they are all manufacturers, and all have very similar issues and concerns which can be raised and discussed as a group. His Peer Council also serves as a sounding board for ideas. Early on, the group helped Todd feel like he wasn't so alone in his leadership, and he could rely on the more senior members of the group to provide wisdom and a listening ear to the challenges of leadership.

Todd stays active and engaged in his local Peer Council because it offers a space to ask questions. Regardless of the industry members work in, they are all manufacturers facing similar issues and concerns that can be discussed together. His Peer Council also acts as a sounding board for ideas. Early on, the group helped Todd feel less alone in his leadership role, and he could count on the more experienced members to share wisdom and listen to his leadership challenges.

When Todd first joined, he was one of the youngest and least experienced in the group, which showed that he often absorbed more information than he could share. As he's grown older and more experienced, he contributes more to his Peer Council by offering information and advice. As the group has changed over the years, it provides opportunities for new growth and perspectives, helping all members stay updated on changing conditions. Recently, Todd has gained considerable value from Enterprise Minnesota and his peers regarding benefits and compensation. Specific issues like healthcare coverage types and amounts, wage trends, retirement plan considerations, and developing compliant HR policies require detailed and nuanced knowledge, which can all be discussed within the group. Having a confidential network of trusted advisors and colleagues in this setting can save time and help avoid mistakes and missteps.

RESULTS



\$600,000 in increased or retained sales



6 jobs created or retained



\$250,000 in cost savings in labor/materials/energy



\$1,150,000 in increased investment

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"Enterprise Minnesota has been very helpful in guiding our business to find solutions to problems that we've had. One thing I like is they recommend ideas that are beneficial to us, such as leadership training or efficiency initiatives, but also help us find ways to reduce costs through grants or incentives. They are always very up on programs that might be available to manufacturers, and I appreciate that."

-Todd Sparrow, President