

# CASE STUDY:

## SOUTHEASTERN MILLS, INC. A CULTURE OF HIGH PERFORMANCE



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Vice-Chairman

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**Jason Marion**  
HR Director

Located in Rome, GA, Southeastern Mills, Inc. is a highly successful supplier to the food industry, serving a national customer base. Southeastern Mills has been operating as a High Performance Work Place for over 12 years.

As a third generation family-owned business, Southeastern Mills has a tradition of strongly held values, hard work and exceptional quality. Implementing the HPWP philosophy was a way to preserve those traditions and manage growth. “Our business was accelerating rapidly and we wanted to safeguard our way of doing business,” said Bob Grizzard, Vice-Chairman. “HPWP gave us a structure to preserve our positive employee relations and our belief in our employees.”

### HIGH PERFORMANCE LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP™

The foundations of Southeastern Mills’ work culture—trust, respect and employee involvement—are passed along to leaders and employees alike in the High Performance Leadership Workshop. Here, leaders continuously challenge themselves to raise the bar on performance, expectations and even their positive assumptions about employees. This has resulted in bold actions that signify Southeastern Mills is a unique place to work:

- Time clocks have been eliminated
- All employees are salaried
- Every employee has an email address for communication and access to the internet
- Employees serve as tour guides on all plant visits

- No reserved parking spaces
- In new plant start-ups, equipment changes and process improvements employees are involved from the ground-up
- All employees are paid for reasonable and necessary absences
- Every employee has a key—incribed with the word TRUST—that opens every door in the facility

Stated simply by Grizzard, “We believe that people, not buildings or equipment are our greatest asset. Long ago we decided to put that belief to the test.”

### HPWP PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT™

As Southeastern Mills has grown, they’ve relied on their leaders to increase momentum and motivation to achieve results. “Increasing performance is central to our company’s success,” says Linda Owens, President. “We promote leaders to manage, motivate and maximize our employee’s performance—not just do the work at a higher rate of pay.”

If you’re wondering why their employees perform at such high levels, the short answer is, because it’s expected. Pick any job description at Southeastern Mills—from front-line employee to Plant Manager—and you’ll spot something unique. Every job description is broad in terms of responsibility and high in terms of performance standards. This technique was learned in the HPWP Performance Management workshop and sharpened by leaders over the years.

At the workshop, leaders have gained confidence in their ability to diagnose when performance



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improvement is needed and to take the right action to address it. Providing constructive feedback that supports performance is so common at Southeastern Mills, often employees take the highly unusual and adult approach of working directly with their peers to address performance issues.

The workshop has provided a framework for high performance that has been reproduced time and again: annual turnover less than 4%, a 60 - 70% reduction in waste, no lost time accidents for 5 years, 0 EEO Charges, a long wait-list of prospective employees and increases in efficiencies often exceeding 100%.

### **HIGH PERFORMANCE ATTENDANCE™**

High expectations play a significant role in Southeastern Mills’ attendance policy, too. As a producer of popular consumer brands and value-added ingredients, the facilities at Southeastern Mills work round-the-clock filling customer orders. Full shifts are imperative to delivering high quality products on time.

Southeastern Mills has maintained extraordinarily high attendance by applying the principles of High Performance Attendance. Here, there are no accrual systems or entitlements for casual absences. Rather, the expectation communicated by leaders is that daily attendance is necessary and required for success.

For Southeastern Mills, High Performance Attendance is just another way to demonstrate their belief in employees doing the right thing—and the facts prove it. “We took out all time clocks for everyone, including shop floor team members,” remarks Jason Marion, HR Director. Instead, Southeastern Mills operates on an all-salaried concept and employees are paid for reasonable and necessary absences. You might think this would increase absenteeism. On the contrary, “Our casual absences have decreased consistently and are currently less than 1%,” reveals Marion.

The policy requires supervisors and managers to be deeply involved with their employees, following-up on every absence in a caring and proactive manner, exercising sound judgment. Employees view it as a breath of fresh air; they recognize that the policy is not applied mechanically or equally as with some traditional systems, but it is applied fairly. Mutual trust and respect are natural outcomes.

### **SOUTHEASTERN MILLS – A GREAT PLACE TO WORK**

For Southeastern Mills, applying the principles of HPWP have provided a way to demonstrate their values of trust and integrity while reaching new levels of financial success. Through their hard work, they’ve earned the distinction of being a great place to work.

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