

# EMPLOYEES FIND SAFETY IN THE STORM OF CHANGE DURING A \$20 MILLION ACQUISITION

Earnest Machine relies on RTC's CARES program to bolster psychological safety and build trust in the face of an acquisition

*Established in 1948, Earnest Machine is a wholesale industrial distributor of large-diameter and specialty fasteners. Headquartered in Cleveland, OH, they sell throughout North America and Europe, focusing on delivering an excellent customer experience.*

## SNAPSHOT

- Mid-size company specializing in distributing nuts and bolts
- Generating \$45 million before engaging with RTC and on the cusp of a \$20 million acquisition
- Headcount: 96 employees

## PROBLEM

Earnest Machine's CEO, Kirk Zehnder, was preparing for a \$20 million acquisition which would require the people in his company to elevate their ability to embrace change (one of Earnest's core values). However, a large number of individuals expressed feeling overloaded with a recent significant software change and an increase in headcount of nearly 15 percent. Asking them to embrace more change amidst already elevated stress was likely to lead to burnout, unnecessary mistakes, and an infusion of drama into the organization if adequate and accelerated support was not also added to augment their sense of safety.

**For this acquisition to be successful—without sacrificing employee well-being in the process—the company needed to increase the felt sense of psychological safety within the organization so that trust, efficiency, respectful dialogue, and hope could support people to navigate and embrace the upcoming changes.**

## Quick Results

**RTC's CARES initiative resulted in the following within 120 days:**



of all employees engaged in at least one support offering—including frontline workers

**33%**

participated in more than 10 hours of voluntary personal development

**54%**

volunteered to participate in additional learnings

**28%**

—more than a quarter of the employees—directly asked for support with a specific issue\*

**26%**

participated in at least four offerings

**1** acquisition made less stressful (for most)!

\*Initial topics that employees shared with RTC included *psychological safety, stress and overwhelm, frustration with systems and processes, issues of distrust, personal challenges, and a lack of personal purpose.*

## SOLUTIONS

To ensure Earnest Machine's success in embracing more change without undue suffering, Kirk partnered with Corey Blake and RTC. Corey stepped into the role of fractional chief culture officer to support Kirk in shifting the company from a potential crisis to hopeful optimism through building a CARES initiative that empowered employees across the organization. Facilitating deeper conversations among leaders and team members, responding with support to employees in need, offering voluntary RTC courses to inspire more productive behaviors, and facilitating team healing work through group retreat experiences all played a part in making this shift a success.

**1 Earnest CARES.** Corey's first commitment was launching a culture support initiative, Earnest CARES, which accepted requests for personal and professional support to navigate the changes in the organization. Conducted within a psychologically safe (re: confidential) process, support requests came from team members across the organization, from the front line to the leadership team (including the CEO himself!).

Through a series of one-on-one coaching and group support sessions, Corey and the RTC team established a psychologically safe space and led by example to demonstrate how to engage in productive conflict, to listen to one another differently using gestalt principles, and to constructively face past team baggage that was weighing Earnest down. RTC's work also helped individuals shift from a victim mindset to a creator mindset, which empowered people with an active willingness to participate in the transformation of the Earnest company culture.

**2 RTC Culture Academy.** Alongside the CARES initiative, Earnest team members voluntarily engaged in several of RTC's online personal development workshops and courses.

- ***Our Courageous Culture: My Powerful Purpose.*** A self-paced, 90-minute online workshop to help connect individual purpose to organizational purpose.
- ***Mastering Trust.*** A self-paced, two-week course that features powerful techniques for leveraging authenticity and self-awareness and enhancing team effectiveness, upgraded to include three facilitated experiences led by Corey.
- ***Connecting on Purpose.*** An eight-week online course facilitated by Corey to deepen team members' understandings of how to leverage their unique gifts at Earnest, while reducing the potential drama they are apt to introduce to the workplace.

All three of these culture support tools focused on teaching Earnest team members how to cultivate and leverage their deeper sense of purpose at work while advancing their soft skills to accelerate trust and raise self-awareness. In particular, nearly one-third of Earnest's employees voluntarily engaged in and graduated from Mastering Trust, a course offering that sets the groundwork for people to shift into a new way of being and engaging with one another.

**I find the work to be incredibly challenging, which is what makes it so rewarding for me and my team.**

—Kirk Zehnder, CEO



**PEOPLE IMPACT** The employees at Earnest Machine have reported a transformative experience for not only their teams and departments, but for themselves personally.

**“I really needed this.**

I am so very thankful that our leadership recognized the healing and culture shift that was needed. I have grown so much personally and have seen the same impact on others here.

I enjoyed the time  
yesterday and it felt  
good to be heard and  
have judgment withheld.  
I needed that more  
than I realized.

The Earnest CARES program made me more receptive to acknowledging what others bring to the team and open to receiving their help.

**A lesson for the masses,  
perfect! Outstanding!**  
The beneficiaries will be  
those in our personal circles,  
our Earnest teammates, but  
especially our Customers!

**Bringing your team on was a great idea and will pay dividends.**

**[Mastering Trust]  
helps you become so  
much more intentional  
about your interactions  
and communications  
with others.**

It has provided many valuable insights . . . I am now able to recognize and be aware of habits I had previously adopted that were not allowing me to move forward in creating a different story.



## Let's Connect

If you're curious about how to care for your culture differently, reach out to us.