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Company/Organization: Cirtronics, an Employee Owned Corporation

Challenge or Opportunity:

The Opportunity:

Cirtronics' Environmental Stewardship Program committee (ESP) identified an opportunity to reduce waste from single-use consumption of plastic flatware in our cafeteria. The committee had already invested in dishwashers, coordinated the availability of regularly cleaned dish towels in our smaller kitchenette and stocked branded ceramic mugs to encourage re-use versus single-use paper cups. It made sense to next tackle reducing use of non bio-degradable plastic.

Plastic production is estimated to use 8% of yearly global oil production. After the energy and water consumed to initially create plastic, only 6% of all plastic waste in the U.S. is recycled due the unique properties of the substrates used, leaving virtually the rest destined for landfills (where decomposition can take up to 1,000 years) as well as oceans (where it threatens marine life).

(Reference "What Happens to All That Plastic" published January 31, 2012 on the Columbia University Earth Institute site <http://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2012/01/31/what-happens-to-all-that-plastic/> and VIV Biz Club's "Plastic Cutlery - Why People Use It and Why You Shouldn't" here: <http://vivbizclub.com/2010/08/20/plastic-cutlery/>.)

The Challenge:

Transitioning to reusable metal flatware would challenge the team to address not only the logistics of cleaning, but also the adoption from our 180+ employee owners accustomed to the convenience of disposable flatware being available at each lunch table.

Approach or Solution:

The ESP committee carefully evaluated several factors to optimize the final solution before offering it to the organization:

- Flatware Selection: We knew adoption depended on selecting flatware of high enough quality that it would hold up well through repeated washings. Moreover, it would have to encourage a perception that they are worth repeated use. Rather than order in bulk online, we identified

local options (Sam's Club) to buy in bulk, which also allowed us to pick up a box of each utensil to try out before buying all we'd need.

- "Conservation Stations": We remodeled recycling stations so that they'd feel familiar to dining at Panera or similar eat-in restaurants. Stations were painted in branded colors and included matching cleaning bins for employee owners to discard used flatware. The stations were put where existing trash cans and plastic/aluminum recycling containers were already in use near cafeteria exits.
- Cleaning Logistics: We garnered support from our existing cleaning staff and also solicited interest from The Plus Company who we provide space in our building. The cleaning staff was supportive of managing the cleaning process. The Plus Company was enthusiastic for another opportunity for their participants to earn money and practice life skills; they signed on to daily replenishing of flatware caddies on each lunch table. We also purchased flatware dishwasher baskets and appropriate dishwasher detergent. As a process company, we were able to create detailed "work instructions". *(For more information about The Plus Company Inc., visit www.pluscompany.org.)*
- Communication: In addition to posters and caddy inserts detailing the new "Conservation Stations", we also communicated the objective and changes during several company meetings leading up to and shortly after introducing the new process.

Impact:

In the five months since the new "Conservation Stations" were introduced in the cafeteria:

- We've seen a 90% decrease in consumption of plastic ware, meeting our primary objective to reduce our environmental impact, as well as enjoying financial benefits.
 - o The initial investment of a couple hundred dollars covered the expense of metal flatware and accessories needed for cleaning and the Conservation Stations. We've reached breakeven point by the end of month 4 and have already begun saving on our traditional plastic ware expenses.

Our ESP committee has already identified its next continuous improvement activity: "Kill the K-Cup"!

Email this document to michelle@nhbsr.org by August 31, 2016!