

2019 Highlights



Challenge

Back in 2014, extreme fluctuations in the prices of commodities created havoc at Kiobassa—especially for its president, Michael Kiobassa. While he had members of his team clamoring to invest in more facilities and operations, Kiobassa knew that the business needed something even more important: cash. “I was also feeling the pain of being the only one in the business who understood the financials,” says Kiobassa, whose grandfather started the business in 1949.



Solution

That crisis that led Kiobassa to The Great Game of Business® (GGOB)—which he saw as a tool that could help bring everyone on his team together. They began by implementing financial literacy training and then rolled out MiniGames™ and A Stake in the Outcome® program to get the firm's team members working toward a common goal— to increase the company's margins.



Results

After playing GGOB for just a couple of years, the company saw transformative results, both financially but also in strengthening its culture of values. But in 2017, the company's commitment to Great Game™ wavered—as did its performance. Communications between teams began to suffer, there was less accountability on budget line items and their profits began to wane. Fortunately, the team recommitted to playing The Game by reevaluating their weekly huddles and divvying up the budget to ensure accountability and communication across departments. Managers then began to “own” their lines. As a whole the company became much better at forecasting their numbers and working together to maximize efficiencies wherever possible while improving their forecasting ability. The result: EBITDA grew over 1,000% (not a typo) since 2017, and the company paid out its first bonus in ten quarters.

“I think the growth in our company is dwarfed by the growth in our people,” says Kiobassa, “just in the way they have been exposed to how our company makes money and generates cash. They have been challenged to make decisions based on what they know. They have grown intellectually and emotionally though that exposure.”



Company Background

The company is a fast-growing craft manufacturer of authentic premium sausage and food products. The company's sausages, which are often described as “the best sausage I've ever had in my life,” are now sold across the U.S. and Mexico.

It has been a privilege and a blessing to become a Kiobassa team member because it has changed my life by actually knowing what the numbers mean, from the cost to produce, to the price we sell our product. I have learned that Kiobassa is like a family. Out of all the jobs I've had, Kiobassa has been the only one that I can really say they care and take time to explain.” ~ Elisa Morin, Sausage Hanger

“I remember when I was applying for a job at Kiolbassa and I saw financials everywhere, my first thought was that someone was going to get in trouble. This was so different than what I was used to. Now that I’m a manager, it’s my role to encourage my team members to own their lines and, if they see something that doesn’t look right, to explain it. If we have questions, other people have them, too. I can’t imagine ever going to work somewhere where I don’t know how the business is doing.” ~ Lisa Gutting, Manager of Sales Analysis

MiniGame™ Spotlight

One of the MiniGames the Kiolbassa team played in 2018 had a Ghostbusters theme: the goal was to track the downtime of a labeling program on three production lines. The team brainstormed all the possible problems which could or may occur and each problem was identified as a “ghost”. The object was to eliminate all the “ghosts” resulting in longer run times. The team tracked the programming problems for 90 days and found that a single issue was causing us over \$541,632 downtime each year. By identifying the key culprit, the team then began to find a more reliable labeling program. Another game the team played was called, K-Force, which was designed to encourage all departments to publicly display their goals to everyone in the company using scoreboards. They ran the game for 90 days and as a result, each department has proudly displayed their scoreboards and uses them for their weekly huddles. Boards are updated weekly and, in some cases, using electronic scoreboards, are updated as often as every minute.

“I really enjoy learning the tools and methods that are used. I have started to take a better look at my finances and really utilize the methods I have learned. At work, our weekly huddles are looking a lot better from the understanding.”

~ Matthew Soto, Sausage Stuffer Operator

What’s Next?

Kiolbassa admits that he and his team are still learning how to play the game at a higher and more consistent level. “Playing The Great Game of Business is a marathon, not a sprint,” says Kiolbassa. “It’s commitment to be on a constant journey.”

“GGOB has helped me to better understand the management of money, especially as we are now looking into buying our own home. It has been a big positive to have a company open up its financials for all to see and understand. It makes me want to succeed because I want my company to succeed.”

~ Patrick Hull, Kitchen Lead

“The Great Game of Business has improved the way I lead my production team. I have seen a difference in their communication and performance because they understand the numbers, expenses, and opportunities for them in the present and future. Understanding more through GGOB, I now have a clearer and simple understanding of the company that makes sense to me and my team.”

~ Julian Ixcaragua, Kitchen Lead
