

BIZ TALK

Use signposts to keep meetings focused

Use signposts to indicate the progress you've made in a meeting and signal the need to move on to other topics.

Signposts are indicators of critical junctures – for example, you might say, "To recap, in the first phase of our discussion, we covered A, B and C. Now, in the next phase we need to address X, Y and Z."

So what? Using signposts in this manner focuses group members' attention on the task instead of on personalities.

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Steady as it grows

As economy picks up, Neenah's Val-Fab sees its fortunes rise

BY JUDY WAGGONER
FOR FOX VALLEY INC.

NEENAH – After enduring three years in "survival mode," Val-Fab of Neenah is riding a tremendous growth wave.

"We went from 40 employees in March to about 75 now," said Keith Picard, who is president and chief executive officer of the Neenah custom metal job shop. He owns Val-Fab with partner Gary Van Linn.

The company saw sales jump from \$8.3 million in 2004 to \$11 million in 2005. The growth is credited to several factors, said Brian Lamers, the company's chief financial officer.

"In the last few years, there has been pent-up demand from a

lack of capital investment," he said.

As manufacturers emerge from the recent economic recession, expansion plans that may have been on drawing boards for some time are dusted off and implemented. Custom metal fabricators like Val-Fab share in this growth.

A former Army combat engineer, Picard and his father, Roger, started Val-Fab in 1984. The elder Picard was a mechanical engineer who had been laid off from an Oshkosh manufacturer.

For the younger Picard, starting a fabrications company wasn't always in the plan. After a tour of military duty during

which he injured his knee, Keith Picard studied marketing and data processing at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh and Fox Valley Technical College. He learned metal fabrication on-the-job for four years.

The father and son team worked well together with Roger responsible for engineering and general management while Keith handled financial and legal operations.

"To our surprise, he passed away totally unexpectedly in '89," Picard said. The fledgling company had gone from a "shoestring" start-up to \$500,000 in sales.

After Roger Picard's death,

A CLOSER LOOK

Val-Fab Inc.

Address: 944 Appleblossom Drive, Neenah

Owners: Keith Picard, Gary Van Linn

Chief personnel: Brian Lamers, chief financial officer; Robert Beaupre, industrial engineer; and Renae Langel, human resource manager

Founded: 1984

Number of employees: 75

Gross annual sales: \$11 million

On the Web:
www.valfab.com

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