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MANAGEMENT TODAY

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## Leading Change for 40 Years

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“Our vision as a company is to lead educational change that positively affects learners.” -Harvey Dean, founder and CEO



# Leading Change for 40 Years

> PITSKO EDUCATION

HARVEY DEAN’S TEACHING PHILOSOPHY HELPED REVOLUTIONIZE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM AND HAS FUELED HIS COMPANY’S GROWTH.

BY KATHRYN JONES

When CEO Harvey Dean and two fellow teachers started Pittsburg Industrial Teachers Service Company (Pitsco) in Pittsburg, Kan., in 1971, they sought to create a unique curriculum for students who had an easier time learning with their hands rather than through textbooks and lengthy lectures.

Their innovative instruction booklets and activity kits were well received by shop class students and teachers alike because they made learning not only fun, but also applicable to the real world. Applied math and science principles were also delineated for teachers to communicate to their students.

“We were trying to help the field of industrial education go beyond just building a project; we wanted kids to experience real production techniques that we use as an industry and include a little bit of science and math,” Dean recalls. “My personal philosophy is that each of us has a God-given role in life to



// Harvey Dean established Pitsco to help students experience real industrial production techniques, while incorporating science and math lessons.

find and actualize. His purpose is to help others. I was not a great student in high school, but I really connected with industrial education. That was the aegis of the way I look at my job now: to help students that were like myself. Our vision as a company is to lead educational change that positively affects learners.”

By the mid to late 1980s, shop class was known as technology education, and

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**Pitsco Education**

[www.pitsco.com](http://www.pitsco.com)

Headquarters: Pittsburg, Kan.

Specialty: Educational and curriculum equipment and supplies

Employees: 220

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teachers were expected to incorporate more technical activities and projects into their curricula. Pitsco introduced the CO2 car to demonstrate mechanical principles such as mass, force, acceleration and aerodynamics.

The dragster kit and supporting equipment and supplies remain strong sellers in the company’s now 386-page catalog, Dean says. An example of a product that Pitsco has developed for dragsters is an accelerometer that can be plugged into a computer to provide students with detailed charts and graphs detailing scientific and mathematical information about each dragster’s race down a 65-foot track.

The end of the 1980s brought forth an evolution in education centered on computer-enhanced curriculum that incor-

porated science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) into hands-on activities. Pitsco developed its Synergistic Systems division to create a series of seven-day modules that packaged curriculum, learning activities and teacher training into a system that could be implemented by schools across the nation.

The module curriculum was offered with an entirely new environment to create easy management for teachers and a new view of how learning can occur. Since 1989, more than 85 percent of all middle schools and high schools have adopted Pitsco's system or a copy from a competitor.

Pitsco became one of several distributors in the 1990s to sell educational kits from LEGO, which differ from the toys LEGO sells in the consumer market. LEGO was so impressed with Pitsco's service that it formed a joint venture with Pitsco and made it responsible for all of LEGO Education's marketing and distribution in the United States and Canada. Pitsco also plays a key role in FIRST, an international robotics competition held annually that incorporates LEGO robots as well as Pitsco's TETRIX robots.

"If there is one word I could use to describe our success, it would be that we have given outstanding service," Dean notes. "I was a teacher, and I value the fact that when I bought something, I got it rather quickly. Teachers who buy from us get a 24-hour turnaround on almost 86 percent of our orders. If they call and say we didn't include a so-and-so in their kit, we don't question that. We fix it."

### ***In Good Company***

In 1997, Dean published a book titled "Changing Education: A Success Story,"



// More than 7 million students benefit from Pitsco's products and solutions every year.

"WHEN YOU BUILD  
A CULTURE THAT  
SHOWS PEOPLE YOU  
CARE ABOUT THEM,  
THEY BECOME  
RESPONSIBLE FOR  
DOING A GREAT JOB,"

which stresses the importance of relevance in education and explains how his revolutionary learning system – the Synergistic System – can help teachers motivate students and ensure their success

now, as well as into the digital age.

The book is full of personal anecdotes about Dean's struggles as a student and how one teacher encouraged him to pursue a career in education. If his mentor had not seen the potential in Dean and helped him cultivate his own teaching style, Pitsco would not have been established and the more than 7 million students who benefit from the company's products and solutions every year would be left in the dark.

Not surprisingly, Dean says that his approach to management mirrors his personal teaching style.

"If you look at the curriculum we've developed for those modules – this is a

phrase I think is important – we have moved the locus of responsibility to that team of two students in that module,” he explains. “But you have to ensure the content is there and there is a progression through that content. My management style is the same.”

Pitsco’s 220 employees are divided into about 50 departments and/or teams that meet on a regular basis. The details of the team meetings are recorded in a specific manner and circulated to what Dean calls his “tribal council” of top management – a team that includes Lisa Paterni, president of Pitsco, and Stephan Turnipseed, president of LEGO Education, who report directly to Dean.

Each team follows a point value system with the opportunity to earn a monetary bonus at the end of the year.

“I have moved the locus of responsibility to our employees,” Dean explains. “If you let people own what they do, you’ll find that is the way they like to work.

When you build a culture within a company that shows people you care about them, they become responsible for doing a great job.

“If they do a great job, you give them a bonus or benefits in return,” he continues. “You must prove you have values and respect for your employees.”

He has implemented this philosophy into the next generation of company lead-

ership, Paterni and Turnipseed, who continue to seek inspiration from Dean. “We believe employees are the basis of our success, and we try to make sure communication among the teams is seamless throughout the entire organization,” Paterni explains.

“Harvey’s done a phenomenal job of making sure every employee feels part of the organization,” she adds. “The growth and success of our company is a credit to him and his penchant for taking a risk and always wanting to take care of students. We don’t gauge our success on revenue only, but on how many students use our products. It’s all about achieving success in the classroom.” •mt