

Pramodita Sharma
Srinivas Venugopal
Nicole Mallett

case 4-174-830
September 14, 2023

Rhino Foods' People-Profit Dilemma: Inclusive Workforce Challenges and Opportunities

Established in 1981, Rhino Foods Inc. of Vermont was a \$60-million food products manufacturing company by 2019, best known as the birthplace of the iconic cookie dough found in Ben & Jerry's famous ice cream. With its *Do Right* ethos and a focus on an inclusive culture, this B Corporation had been ranked among the best workplaces in its industry and manufactured products for some of the largest food companies in the United States.

Now it again faced a challenge of balancing its people-centric culture with producing consistently high-quality products. In July 2019, a lively discussion was happening at the round table of the Rhino Foods meeting room. Present were Ted Castle, the company's founding president; his son, Rooney Castle, Rhino vice president and soon to be the president; Gene Steinfeld, director of operations; and Caitlin Goss, director of people and culture and the newest member of the top management team.

Earlier that year, Rhino Foods began to experiment working with the local correctional facility to hire new recruits from among people being released from the prison. Operational efficiency was a chief goal for Rhino Foods, particularly for Steinfeld.¹ But for Goss, inclusive hiring and driving a supportive, all-embracing culture among the employees were imperative, and this new initiative could put the company at the forefront of social inclusion work in Vermont and beyond.²

Referred to as No Background Checks, this initiative would eliminate barriers to employment for entry-level job applicants, including a career break forced by child- or elder-care responsibilities, incarceration, rehabilitation for substance abuse, homelessness, and being new to the region.³ Spearheaded by Goss, the initiative aimed to recruit much-needed staff at a time when Vermont's labor pool was particularly low while staying on course with Rhino's people-centric orientation.⁴

Published by WDI Publishing, a division of the William Davidson Institute (WDI) at the University of Michigan.

© 2023 Pramodita Sharma, Srinivas Venugopal, and Nicole Mallett. This case was written by Pramodita Sharma, Professor & Schlesinger-Grossman Chair of Family Business, Srinivas Venugopal, Associate Professor, and Nicole Mallett, Research Assistant and Sustainable Innovation MBA 2022, all at the University of Vermont's Grossman School of Business. The case was prepared as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a situation. The case should not be considered criticism or endorsement and should not be used as a source of primary data. The case was reviewed and approved by Ted Castle, Founder of Rhino Foods, before publication.
