

# A Seamless Stitch



Signing on the dotted line marks the closing of a deal, but not for Birla Carbon and Columbian Chemicals. For them, it marked the beginning of a relationship. On 21<sup>st</sup> June 2011, the two companies that had spent fourteen years as competitors found that a sheaf of papers could change everything whilst disrupting nothing.

Preparations had begun months in advance, with six task forces ensuring this would be a seamless transition for both customers and colleagues. The team knew that the first few days after the integration would be make-or-break in creating one team united by one dream. The expectant nervousness slowly gave way to content smiles as all the hours spent paying attention to every detail paid off with a smooth, quick and hiccup-free beginning. The effort to combine cultures and values alongside footprint and financials was apparent to those on the inside and customers looking in.

From the word go, it was clear that this was an integration, not an acquisition. The Aditya Birla Group didn't want to tear the companies apart; it wanted to build one powerful company on the shoulders of two equally strong ones. Reassurance that everyone was to be a part of one seamless team came in the form of a message from Mr. Birla that remains with people to the present day, "When you are back home, tell your teams – not a single man or woman will be turfed out. You are now part of our extended family." The first email sent out by the Chairman didn't just go out in English – from Mandarin and Korean in the East to Hungarian and Spanish in Europe, it spoke to everyone in their own tongue. It showed the Group's commitment to bringing people into the fold and not forcing anyone to adapt to its ways.

In the offices, between emails sent and phone calls made, change was on its way. Common email ID's were created, newsletters chronicling integration efforts and achievements were published, and fresh cards printed. But beyond the corporate efforts the integration was also being given wings by colleagues on the ground. People found their own unique way to bind themselves to the company that had enveloped them into their system with care. Including spontaneously painting the values on factory walls to show commitment to the new way of living.

While the internal transition was taken care of seamlessly under the strong leadership of the senior management, the bigger challenge was to assure the customers that even though the two companies have been the biggest competitors in the strictest sense of the word, their integration would in no way

affect them and their expectations. The customers were assured not just with words but with actions. Both the teams came together as one and made every single interaction with the customers count, delivering confidence and practical impact. Earnest passion and commitment ensured the customer was only positively affected with the overnight business changes. Testimony to this effort, customers have applauded the integrity with which the face of Birla Carbon has evolved.

A shared vision based in values has brought together two companies. The integration gave Birla Carbon a foothold in the mature North American market and strengthened its position in Europe and other emerging markets. But it also did one other important thing: it taught everyone the importance of unity.