

# Operations Facility Says “Can We Talk?”



*Mick Roberts, vice president, Hutchison Group Inc., leads employees during a session on improving communications.*

Some of the best ideas for process and product improvements are hatched on the front lines of the manufacturing process. But unless these ideas are communicated to upper management, it's like they were never formed. As part of Lorillard's continuous-improvement plan, an ongoing process is underway to improve communication among all employees.

"There is clearly value in improving the lines of communication between the company and its work force," said **Barry Jenkins**, president, Local 317-T of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union. "The process we have started provides people with the opportunity to share their opinions in a non-threatening way."

An outside employee-relations and communications firm, Hutchison Group Inc., has been conducting meetings with hourly employees and separate meetings with supervisors and managers for almost a year. The firm facilitates discussion about communication issues, helping to identify both problems and opportunities for improvement.

"It's important that we listen to employees, but it often requires an extra effort," said Cameron Hutchison, president, Hutchison Group Inc. "In order to improve,

people in the organization need to know they are valued and appreciated."

Better communication is key to avoiding mistakes and improving efficiencies. But before employees will talk to supervisors about delicate issues, there must be an environment of mutual trust and respect.

"We need to be able to work together to identify the root cause of our problems, and then solve them as a team," Jenkins said. "At the same time, we want to celebrate the positive things that make this an extremely good company for which to work."

While some initiatives have already been put in place, the true test of effective communications is how well the process works over time.

"We are the only major tobacco company that is growing in this challenging environment. The only way we can sustain this growth is through everyone's active participation. We must be willing to consider a variety of opinions from our entire work force," said **Ned Hennighausen**, executive vice president, Production Operations. "We are committed to continuous improvement which relies on open, active communication."