

EDUCATED WORKERS STREAMLINE OPERATIONS TO KEEP MANUFACTURER COMPETITIVE

BACKGROUND:

Vehicle Safety Manufacturing (VSM), a division of Rostra Precision Controls, Inc., operates its plant in Newark, New Jersey. The company which was founded in 1979 is the largest manufacturer of heavy-duty turn signal switches in North America. The ISO certified company serves both the OEM and replacement markets. VSM products are in use on vehicles and equipment worldwide as they serve customers in North and South America, Europe, Asia, Australia and Africa.

VSM designed its manufacturing facilities to produce high quality products in the most efficient & economical manner. The company utilizes state of the art equipment, employs a top-notch engineering staff and operates a tough quality control department to assure that it's VSM products are engineered and built to the most exacting of standards and meet or exceed all DOT and SAE requirements (when used as recommended).

CHALLENGE:

In 2015 VSM acquired the turn signal switch product line from Grote Industries, Inc. in Madison, Indiana. The assets and manufacturing lines were relocated to its Newark plant.

In a global market it is critical that companies remain competitive and it is especially true in the Class 8 truck supply business. VSM must continually work to improve its efficiency in order to reduce its manufacturing cost. Having worked with NJMEP to implement Lean and ISO over the years VSM once again worked with them to streamline the plant.

SOLUTION:

After assessing the current situation, NJMEP recommended using Lean tools and techniques to achieve factory flow improvements. As a small business, due to the cost, training in these methodologies would have to be spread out over 3 years. NJMEP recommended applying for a Skills4Jersey Grant to enable VSM to meet its objectives within 1 year. They then assisted with the application and when approved, the management of the grant process.

Over the course of one year NJMEP's resources worked with VSM to educate its production workers and managers in Value Stream Mapping, Set up Reduction/Quick Change, Cellular Flow, Production Pull/Kanban, Project Management, ISO Quality System and English as a Second Language. These courses cross trained workers enabling them to better understand the entire process and enabled them to recognize problems and present viable solutions.

RESULTS:

When completing the close-out report at the conclusion of the grant, Rebecca Kirshman, VP and General Manager, VSM, indicated the company:

- Hired new workers
- Started a new line for manufacturing switches

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- Reduced waste
- Increased daily production
- Was able to maintain the selling price of its products in spite of higher wage and material costs because of the increased productivity of its workers

Ms. Kirshman, in completing the independently conducted NIST survey, which is done 6-12 months after a project ends, reported:

- Increased sales \$150,000
- Created 21 jobs and promoted 5 employees
- Achieved a cost saving of \$35,000
- Invested \$250,000 in new processes and products

Ms. Kirshman, when asked about working with NJMEP responded, “I was very pleased with the work NJMEP did for us with our workforce. Thanks to them our employees understand the importance of cross training and they have honed their skills. It’s that understanding and those skills that have helped us remain competitive in this global market.”

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