

COMMONWEALTH BRANDS CONGRATULATES ITS 20 NEW LEAN
LEADER

ABOUT COMMONWEALTH BRANDS, INC. Business acquisitions bring numerous changes, both small and large for Reidsville-based Commonwealth Brands, one of the biggest changes following its 2009 acquisition by British parent company Imperial Brands was the implementation of a facility-wide Organizational Excellence Program, or OEP. Commonwealth Brands' HR Manager, Mark Evans, describes the OEP as a "European Lean". He prepped the company's 250 employees to transition to the new quality system with a four-hour introductory course to Lean concepts and terminology, facilitated by NC State's Industry Expansion Solutions (IES). The OEP was then rolled out over the course of ten months; an IES Regional Manager attended closely as the company aggressively tackled waste and pursued productivity increases. Commonwealth Brands achieved four milestones marking progress through the OEP. Upon completion of the fourth, there was a huge celebration.

THE CHALLENGE. While many managers may have been content to rest on their laurels at that point, Evans knew that the results that Commonwealth was working toward could be easily derailed if the program was not sustained. Because the IES Regional Manager had witnessed the entire implementation process, he immediately knew what kinds of Lean tools Commonwealth Brands needed to maintain and enhance its existing program.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. One of the first practical projects completed was the creation of a "war room," where vital statistics on production and safety became public, and transparency was given new precedence. Employee engagement programs were also created, and managers became involved with cleaning and maintenance alongside operators on the facility floor. Along with the company's cost savings, employee engagement rates began to rise, climbing from 36 percent to 55 percent as reported in surveys. Still, Evans was reluctant to stop. The results to date—including more than \$2m in cost savings and the creation of two new jobs—could be vulnerable if employee engagement waned.

"The question, again, was, 'How do we sustain it?'" Evans says. The answer was to challenge employees to learn even more. Through funding from Rockingham Community College's NC Works Customized Training Program, 20 employees began training for Lean

Leader Green Belt certification. For two months, an IES trainer traveled to conduct classes every two weeks, and between classes the students were responsible for completing extensive readings, in addition to working on Lean projects within the facility. Study groups formed. Notecards were made. And, on July 20, 2016, all 20 employees received plaques designating them as Lean Leader Green Belts.

"From my point of view, having the Lean Leader Green Belt training—doing the projects, reading the books, taking the tests—keeps Lean in front of the team all the time," says Evans. He expects prior results to not only be sustained, but amplified.

RESULTS



Increased employee engagement by close to **20%**



\$2M in cost savings



Two jobs created/retained

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