

## SMART TALENT SUCCESS FOR GROWING COMPANY

**ABOUT MILES FIBERGLASS.** Founded in 1963, Miles Fiberglass and Composites (MFC) has over 50 years of experience in the fiberglass and composites industry. The family-owned corporation employs 73 people between its two plants in Oregon City, and Portland, Oregon, with approximately 55 production employees.

**THE CHALLENGE.** As part of its growth strategy and ongoing commitment to its workforce and community, MFC made the resolution to invest in employee development. The company's growth projections, along with an influx of new hires, prompted MFC to seek out improvement opportunities related to workforce training and development. The company had worked with the Oregon Manufacturing Extension Partnership (OMEP), a NIST MEP affiliate, on variety of efforts over the years. This time, MFC partnered with OMEP to prototype its new training system, the SMART Talent approach.

**MEP CENTER'S ROLE.** Embracing the idea (put forward by MIT lecturer Peter M. Senge) that "the only sustainable competitive advantage is an organization's ability to learn faster than the competition," the SMART Talent approach prioritizes education and speed. A first step was to break down the duties of several key production positions into individual action steps. OMEP and MFC organized the action steps into learning modules for employees to use to train other workers, in a process known as Structured On the Job Training (SOJT). Key employees became organizational trainers through train-the-trainer classes that utilized adult learning theory. At the same time, MFC worked with OMEP to build development pathways for employees. MFC staff became proficient quickly, and the company absorbed new hires more easily. In one case, an employee had worked for 10 months in one area without receiving training for any other tasks. After establishing the in-house training program, that employee was able to work in a different department after a few hours of coaching. Another new hire decided to stay at MFC rather than leave for a higher-paying employer because they saw the commitment MFC makes to employees and recognized a clear path for moving upward in the company.

MFC has also embraced the concept of building a "learning culture." Instead of compensating employees based on longevity and basing reviews on subjective evaluations, the company moved to a true compensation model based on skills and knowledge. The new, "learn to earn" compensation system engenders a more engaged, proficient, and competitive workforce. In addition, MFC has seen a tangible reduction in rework, continues to retain talent, and is accomplishing more with its current staff due to cross-training.

**"One of the best attributes OMEP has is their deep understanding of working with manufacturers. They understand [that] you have to run production while at the same time working on making production better."**

-Lori Miles Luchak, President

## RESULTS



**\$4,000,000** in new sales and \$250,000 existing sales



**6 jobs created and 5 jobs retained**



Cost savings of **\$840,000**



Commitment to employee growth, clear career opportunities

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