CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT WALK IMPROVES QUALITY

ABOUT SEASONS-4, INC. Seasons-4, an employee-owned company in Douglasville, Georgia, has been designing and building custom HVAC systems for commercial buildings and other large facilities since 1971. With two plants, the company employs around 230 people. Its HVAC systems utilize the latest technology available and can be installed on-site to accommodate customers’ schedules with minimal disruption.

THE CHALLENGE. Seasons-4 was experiencing issues with quality defects and inefficiencies in the production system, and the management team was looking for a training program for the front line supervisors. Saibal Sengupta, Executive VP and CEO, met with representatives from the Georgia Manufacturing Extension Partnership (GaMEP), part of the MEP National Network, at an industry roundtable event. A few months later he reached out to GaMEP to discuss the issues they were experiencing at the plant.

MEP CENTER’S ROLE. Before launching into a training program, GaMEP suggested starting with an assessment of the entire business operation to produce a more holistic view of the company's needs. GaMEP managers visited the plant and spent two days talking with employees and collecting data. Using the Organizational Excellence framework, a GaMEP model that helps manufacturers pinpoint areas to allow for future growth, they then made recommendations to the management team. To address the lack of daily communication between staff and management, GaMEP helped the team implement a daily Continuous Improvement (CI) walk. Now, the plant manager, production manager, and a representative from every department in the office walk the plant floor each day. They visit each of the nine workstations and go through a “daily improvement board,” with four sections corresponding to the company’s improvement goals: safety, quality, target hours, and an open area to address miscellaneous problems.

Initially, Seasons-4 employees were skeptical that the walk would be useful enough to warrant time away from their regular work tasks. However, those opinions soon began to change. “The daily improvement walk has helped us solve problems much faster, just by opening up the lines of communication,” explained Sengupta. The team starts at the end of the line and walks backward toward the beginning, improving efficiency and reducing quality defects along the way. Based on feedback from the plant floor, GaMEP gained a clear idea of the trainings supervisors needed, including Job Methods, Safety, Relationship Skills, Problem Solving, and Training Techniques. The Job Methods model reduced scrap wire at the cutting station, generating additional cost savings.

"The training that we did with GaMEP was different from others that we have done in the past. The quality of the instructors and the initial evaluation that helped them understand our company as a whole made all the difference. We learned that to make training effective you have to find the gaps first, discuss it with leadership, and then work with the front line leaders to implement.”

-Saibal Sengupta, Executive VP and CEO

RESULTS

- Improved overall efficiency by 10%
- Reduced quality defects by approx. 20%
- Reduced scrap wire by 10%
- Scrap reduction generated nearly $50,000 in savings
- Employee training created a problem solving culture at the plant

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