DARN TOUGH VERMONT'S LEAN THINKING PROGRAM KNITS TEAM TIGHTER THAN EVER

ABOUT DARN TOUGH VERMONT. Darn Tough Vermont is a three-generation, family-owned, manufacturer of end-use-specific socks located in Northfield, VT. For 41 years, they've designed, manufactured, sold and promoted the most comfortable, durable and best fitting socks available in the market. This promise is backed by their unconditional lifetime guarantee; if you can wear out their socks, they'll replace them free of charge. 250 full-time employees produce socks for 12 key customers around the world.

THE CHALLENGE. Darn Tough wished to introduce Lean Thinking to its key leadership, as well as team members such as leads, supervisors and managers from the Operations Dept. The project was originally set up as a Principles of Lean pilot for 40 employees. The goal for Darn Tough was to have VMEC offer skills that team members can both learn and apply to everyday issues. Darn Tough predicted that the benefit of working together and having common experiences from the learning would directly impact and improve operations.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. As the pilot project was underway, it became clear to key leadership members that training in Lean Thinking company-wide would be fundamental to Darn Tough’s continued success and growth. The original pilot project was revamped to ensure all employees undergo training within the Lean tool set, offering opportunities to reduce waste and thus improve quality, create standard work, reduce variability and/or remove constraints that were creating issues. The end result was training in the following Lean areas was provided to all employees at Darn Tough Vermont--Principles of Lean, Structured Problem Solving with coaching, Project Management, Fundamentals of Lean Office and Value Stream Mapping.

"Our success with VMEC does not come from the multitude of programs they offer, although they are excellent, but rather from the synergistic intersection of their experienced practitioners and our participants. Whether in a 1:1 interchange or facilitating a large classroom experience the VMEC Team became an extension of the Darn Tough family. Our "opportunities" became VMEC’s opportunities as they didn’t just give us the answer, but led us on a journey of self-discovery and self-sufficiency. I cannot think of a better Team to partner with on our lean journey here at Darn Tough Vermont."

-Kirk Smith, Director of Manufacturing

RESULTS

- $600,000 in increased sales
- 3 jobs created
- $200,000 in retained sales
- $65,000 in saved investment amounts

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