

PACKAGING PROCESS KAIZEN & KATA LEAD TO 70% INCREASE IN OUTPUT FOR ASIAN FOOD MANUFACTURER

ABOUT CHI KITCHEN. Chi Kitchen is a woman-owned family business in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, founded by chef and culinary educator Minnie Luong along with her husband, Tim Greenwald. Launched in 2015, the company creates flavorful, hand-crafted Asian foods using only the best ingredients free of MSG and preservatives.

THE CHALLENGE. Chi Kitchen had enjoyed swift success and growth of their fermented vegetable products, mostly Kimchi. As time went on, the team found it difficult to scale processes and workforce to produce the desired quantity of product. After CEO or, as Chi Kitchen calls it, "CHI-EO" Luong attended a Polaris MEP "One Day Lean" workshop, she recognized the company would benefit from lean manufacturing services. Before reaching out to Polaris MEP, part of the MEP National Network™, for help, the packing and jarring of the kimchi was taking too long at 60 seconds a jar - this was too costly. Chi Kitchen was packing 41 cases of product in an eight-hour shift with three people, including setup and cleanup time. "I knew that in order to grow our business and our sales, we would need to increase that dramatically," said Luong.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. The Polaris MEP team proposed a two-step process: a Kimchi packaging kaizen event and ongoing kata. A kaizen event is a tool within lean manufacturing, in which a team designs and then acts on improvements to a process or work area. Kata (or "Toyota Kata") is a lean process improvement structure; the kata in this case took the form of ongoing coaching.

The kimchi packaging kaizen was an on-site, all day facilitation event to identify areas of waste in the current packing and operating pattern in Chi Kitchen. The team conducted direct floor observations, brainstormed solutions, and documented the lessons they learned.

The second step was kata support, an on-site, four-step method for problem solving in facilitation services. Polaris MEP supported Chi Kitchen in implementing the desired future state for packing line optimization. Through these steps and documentation, the team realized the packing process needed to be standardized, allowing Chi Kitchen to produce the product required to meet demand while maintaining quality standards.

"As a small business owner, there's so much stress. Whatever you can do to reduce that stress is empowering," said Luong. "We're manufacturing a traditional Asian-style food in an artisanal process. Lean manufacturing fits well with our philosophy of putting our chi into things. We can thoughtfully choose where we're going to put that chi energy as opposed to just flying by the seat of our pants."

"One thing that surprised me was how little investment Chi Kitchen had to make in equipment to achieve our goals. It was really based upon the kata process and making small changes -- the return on investment of this project was huge."

-Minnie Luong, Founder and "CHI-EO"

RESULTS



\$50,000 in cost savings



\$100,000 in increased sales
and \$50,000 in retained sales



5 jobs created, 3 jobs retained



70% increase in output

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