

BOB'S RED MILL NATURAL FOOD

ABOUT BOB'S RED MILL, INC. Bob's Red Mill was founded in 1978 to provide wholesome stone-ground flour and grain to local markets. In 2010, after years of successful growth, ownership of the company was transferred to its employees through an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP). The Milwaukie facility employs over 600 staff with four production shifts.

THE CHALLENGE. OMEP, part of the MEP National Network™, was invited to help the continuous improvement team build a new training and development process. Bill Lozier, chief operating officer, stated, "We wanted a structured approach to getting better on the shop floor. We wanted to know how to measure ourselves. How do we learn from our mistakes and make improvements?"

Increasing the efficiency of large equipment installation projects, with a primary focus on reducing the time required to install and commission product packaging lines, was a major goal of the operations group. Additionally, as an employee-owned company, they wished to empower all employees in the organization. Leadership desired all staff working toward the same production key performance indicators (KPIs) to better measure effectiveness.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. OMEP's on-site consultants adopted a blended continuous improvement approach with Bob's Red Mill, focusing on problem solving, capacity creation and culture building. OMEP worked closely with the operations leadership team to identify which processes to focus on. Safety, in general, was selected as the vehicle for problem-solving training. It was accessible and relatable to everyone in the plant and didn't require special technical knowledge for staff to participate meaningfully. The new equipment installation process was also selected as a target area to teach project management and build additional production capacity quickly. Increasing capacity was a priority for the organization. In each case, OMEP created customized training for the Bob's Red Mill team and then used real-world events and projects to practice the new skills. Bill said, "I was pleasantly surprised at the increased level of interest everyone had in the process. Our continuous improvement meetings were open to anyone in the organization, and we saw engagement with every level of employee." As the Bob's Red Mill team and OMEP continued to partner to achieve goals, they engaged in regular post-mortem reviews of completed projects, helping the Bob's Red Mill team integrate what they learned into their next projects. Additional continuous improvement tools such as visual tracking boards at the packaging lines, Gemba walk routines, and individual leadership coaching engagements were included, allowing Bob's Red Mill develop their culture not only in operations but also in HR, new product development, customer service and other parts of the organization.

"By working with OMEP our workforce, from the floor staff on up, discovered a new way of operating and thinking. We can apply this to any project or problem. We originally came to OMEP to learn about increasing machine productivity, but we have instead created an entirely new, more effective method of working."

-Bill Lozier, Chief Operating Officer

RESULTS



5% improvement in packaging line productivity



20% reduction in installation time for new equipment



Balanced workload for engineering staff through improved recruiting, hiring and training

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