

ADOPTING A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

ABOUT WS EMERSON. Established in 1921, W.S. Emerson is a family-owned business in Brewer, Maine. In the 1990s, W.S. Emerson transitioned from a wholesale business providing blank product to many New England businesses to decorators of wearable goods that caters to retail and corporate industries. W.S. Emerson's state-of-the-art facility spans over 50,000 square feet and employs a team of nearly 60 dedicated professionals.

THE CHALLENGE. In 2018, W. S. Emerson found itself in a challenging position due to the swift emergence of online competitors. The company decided to revamp its approach to employee training, and Vice President Betsy Vickery took the initiative to connect with Bill Whittier of Maine MEP, part of the MEP National Network™. Together, they devised a comprehensive plan to introduce lean training to all employees and conduct kaizen problem-solving workshops across every department.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. The collaboration with the Maine Community College System was instrumental in making this plan a reality. Initially, the MCCS provided full funding for the initiative before the onset of the pandemic. Despite the challenges brought about by the pandemic, the MCCS continued to support the project, albeit at a reduced 50% funding level. This ongoing financial support enabled W. S. Emerson to implement lean training and kaizen workshops effectively, equipping their workforce with the necessary skills and mindset to drive continuous improvement and operational excellence.

Maine MEP and W.S. Emerson were successful in putting nearly 80 employees through Principles of Lean Training. As a result of these efforts, the company successfully implemented a "less than two-week" lead time for its products, and smaller orders were processed and shipped within days instead of weeks. This transformation not only improved operational efficiency but also enhanced customer satisfaction by delivering products more swiftly and reliably.

"Since partnering with Bill Whittier and the MEP team in 2018, our company has tackled challenges head-on by leveraging our lean toolbox. The implementation of the 5S approach has yielded substantial improvements in our production areas. We reevaluated our inventory placement, optimizing it for better management. Additionally, we conducted a thorough overhaul of the three production zones, eliminating excess and outdated equipment to enhance order flow and improve working conditions for our employees.

Maintaining a focus on continuous improvement has not only fostered a more robust work culture but has also facilitated stronger communication within our team. Daily huddles serve as a platform to address challenges, discuss upcoming projects, and share pertinent information. Bill Whittier's influence on our team has been invaluable; he is regarded as a highly valued member and partner who has significantly enhanced our business operations in numerous ways. "

-Betsy Vickery, VP/Co-Owner

RESULTS



12 created or retained jobs



\$957,739 in new investment



\$75,000 training investment in payroll and consulting match



38% increase in sales

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