

CHALKING UP SUCCESS: FRICTION LABS' LEAN MANUFACTURING EVOLUTION

ABOUT FRICTION LABS. Friction Labs isn't your average company—it's where climbers turned entrepreneurs, Kevin Brown and Keah Kalantari, decided to shake things up in the world of climbing chalk and grip enhancers. What began a decade ago as rock climbers making chalk has evolved into a team of proud manufacturers who also happen to be passionate rock climbers, blending their love for the sport with a commitment to crafting top-notch products.

THE CHALLENGE. In the early days, Friction Labs relied on co-packers for manufacturing, allowing Kevin and Keah to focus on sales and marketing, areas where they had extensive experience. They soon realized, however, that taking control of the manufacturing process could lead to cost savings and higher product quality.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. Enter Anthony Bruno, who knew Kevin from the climbing gym, joining as the Production Manager about two years ago. A year into the role, Bruno was introduced to and went about implementing a fresh perspective and approach after attending Lean 101 training with Manufacturer's Edge, part of the MEP National Network™, in the summer of 2023.

The adoption of lean principles brought about a significant shift within Friction Labs in both process and operations as well as culture. What was once a manual, labor-intensive process became a streamlined, data-driven operation. The concept of Kaizen, or continuous improvement, resonated deeply with the team, resulting in daily enhancements in efficiency and productivity.

One key insight was optimizing unit production rates, moving from units per hour to units per minute—a previously overlooked metric. This data-driven approach not only improved operational efficiency but also fostered a sense of pride and purpose among team members. Lean practices also played a pivotal role in new product development, allowing Friction Labs to consider lead times and process efficiencies from the product's conceptualization phase. This holistic approach ensured that innovation wasn't just about creating new products but optimizing the entire production cycle.

Through their partnership with Manufacturer's Edge, Friction Labs not only improved manufacturing processes but also nurtured a culture of openness to new ideas and continuous improvement. Today, they stand as a prime example of how dedication to excellence and a willingness to embrace change can elevate an entire industry.

"The world of lean manufacturing really changed our company culture. 100%. From the bottom to the top. All the sudden, we had the people working the production line talking about line balancing. Talking about "how do we improve this process?" And for me as a manager and for Kevin and Keah, the owners of the company, when you have people who are actually doing the work focused on making improvements, it makes us all sleep better at night!"

-Anthony Bruno, Production Manager

RESULTS



Changed from rock climbers who manufacture to manufacturers who rock climb



20 units per hour to 25

CONTACT US



Manufacturer's Edge
1667 Cole Boulevard, Suite
400
Lakewood, CO 80401



(303)592-4087



www.manufacturersedge.com

