

HIGHLAND FORGE: CUSTOM DRAPERY HARDWARE MANUFACTURER EMBRACES CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT, BOOSTS PRODUCTIVITY

ABOUT HIGHLAND FORGE. Highland Forge, co-owned by Ford Kinzey and Mark Woodward, specializes in custom drapery hardware and interior design. Founded in 2005, the vertically-integrated manufacturer has 11 employees who operate out of a 12,000-square-foot facility in Atlanta. They handcraft brackets, finials, rings, and rods using durable, eco-friendly, and high-quality materials with a lifetime warranty. With more than 50 years of combined experience, they take pride in delivering tailored solutions to commercial and residential clients and have been featured in Country Living, New York, and Southern Living magazines.

THE CHALLENGE. In late 2023, Kinzey and Woodward learned about Georgia Manufacturing Extension Partnership (GaMEP) at Georgia Tech, part of the MEP National Network™, through a recommendation from a fellow manufacturer. Interested in optimizing their operations, they contacted the GaMEP South Metro Atlanta region manager. After touring their facility, he suggested a value stream mapping project to evaluate their current processes and identify opportunities for improvement and connected them with Brad Wood, GaMEP's operational excellence project manager.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. Wood kicked off the project by introducing lean manufacturing principles, such as continuous flow, value-added activities, and waste elimination. The team then selected three products – curved return rods, end caps, and standard brackets – to map and time every step from fabrication to production. This visual approach helped them identify inefficiencies and prioritize opportunities.

“We don't know what we don't know,” said Kinzey. “We didn't go into this expecting to see the outcome that we did, but it was a very nice surprise that we ended up with the results that we did.”

Most of the actionable steps comprised minor product and layout changes, including replacing jigs to prevent slippage and repetitive adjustments and relocating product bins to more accessible areas to save time.

This process also revealed inefficiencies in their fabrication batch processing. Wood introduced them to a continuous flow, team-based approach where products move seamlessly from one employee to the next. This shift not only increased individual and overall productivity, but it also led to opportunities, such as crossing-training and flexibility for three fabricators and more time for product research and development.

“It's not one quick fix that'll help us increase capacity,” said Kinzey. “It's a lot of little adjustments that add up. All the small improvements help you grow more and more over time.”

“Working with Brad was a really great experience. He's an enjoyable and a great person to work with. He's very knowledgeable with real-world manufacturing experience. He really understood our manufacturing challenges and pain points.”

-Ford Kinzey, Co-Owner

RESULTS



\$1,300 invested in reliable measuring devices to eliminate recalibration



Identified **95** actionable improvements, including 28 high-priority actions



50% boost in productivity for 20 products



20% improvement in overall productivity



Maintained a 3-week lead time longer

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