

CEO Finds Support in Monthly Discussions with Manufacturing Company Leaders

Company Profile

In 1985, Flex-Tec, a wire preparation and harness assembly company, opened its doors. As part of its business model, Flex-Tec focuses solely on the North American market, allowing the company to promote a selling proposition, unique to its industry, of specializing in short lead times and rapid responsiveness.

Over the last decade, as more finished goods were sourced and produced in Mexico and overseas, client manufacturers also began purchasing components overseas for their finished goods. This trend has been adversely affecting the United States wire component industry and businesses like Flex-Tec, reducing their market potential in North America. In addition, other pressing issues such as rising business costs, changing governmental regulations, and increasing technological advancements means business owners must be able to address a broad range of challenges.

Despite the recent recession and overseas activity, Flex-Tec has been able to maintain profitability for various reasons. Among them are its industry-specific certifications, such as Underwriters Laboratory and IPC-WHMA-A-620, and the implementation of lean manufacturing principles, resulting in high levels of outgoing quality product.

Situation

In the late 2000s, Chuck Fitch, CEO and owner of Flex-Tec, engaged the **Georgia Manufacturing Extension Partnership (GaMEP)** at Georgia Tech on an 18-month coaching assignment to implement the quality management system, ISO 9001.

Four years ago, Fitch was approached by Ed Murphy, GaMEP project manager, to attend an information session on a new initiative – a CEO Forum providing manufacturing leaders the opportunity to meet monthly to confidentially discuss issues affecting them and their companies. As someone responsible for a business, Fitch had been seeking a means to discuss issues and decisions that CEOs face. While family and friends were a great resource, Fitch quickly saw the benefit of a confidential environment that would provide him an outlet to contribute, listen, and learn from others' experiences.

Solution

At the CEO Forum, each member prepares a 3-minute monthly drill, in which they present to the group issues they are experiencing within three areas – business, personal, and family. The facilitators, Murphy and Derek Woodham, GaMEP West region manager, with the support of the SBDC Area Director, Mark Lupo, then lead the group to vote on two or three of those issues to discuss further. Once decided, the persons whose issues are chosen go into further detail and articulate to the group what they are trying to resolve.

According to the rules of the forum, the group is not permitted to give advice, but instead they are encouraged to share their own personal experience that relates to the issue at hand. They convey the details of their circumstance and provide insight as to how they handled the similar situation. This allows the CEO with the original issue to receive numerous examples of how others have handled challenges, and helps them apply what they learned to their situation. At the next monthly meeting, the person is asked to share an update on the situation, completing the communication and learning cycle, which solidifies the idea behind this unique group.

Fitch continues to find value in attending. Through an understanding of others' actions, he has been able to be indirectly advised, helping him make confident decisions on instances pertinent to the future of his business.

"It's a cathartic type of experience and I've learned a lot from this cohesive group of great people, both personally and professionally," Fitch said. "Candidly, as a business owner you often have issues facing you that are just either not of interest to others in your circle of friends, family, confidants, and business associates or they just don't relate to the business issues the way those at the CEO Forum can."

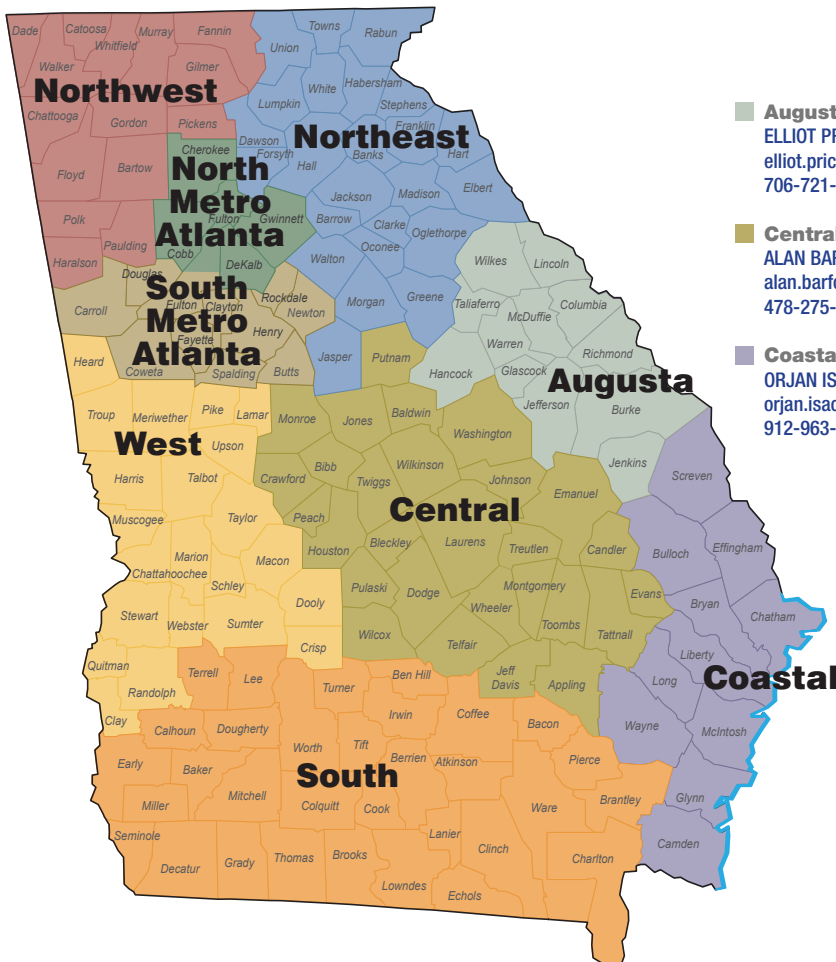
Results

Fitch has been a part of the CEO Forum for four years. In those years, many of his issues have been selected for further discussion. He finds that he has experienced many of the issues that are brought up from other members and is able to contribute to the conversation by sharing his own experiences. Whether or not his issue is selected, he continues to gain insight from every session.

Testimonial

"Without knowing much about a CEO Forum, I knew if the GaMEP was developing it, I was compelled to learn more. After attending the initial presentation, it became clear that it was going to be a great learning opportunity," Fitch said.

For additional information about GaMEP services, visit www.gamep.org or contact the regional manager in your area. If you are located outside of Georgia, contact Karen Fite, State Regional Network Manager.



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