



Success Story: Seasons-4

A Season 4 Change

Since 1971, Seasons-4, an employee-owned company in Douglasville, Georgia, has been designing and building custom HVAC systems for commercial buildings and other large facilities. With two plants, the company employs up to 200 people. Its HVAC systems utilize the latest technology available and can be installed on-site in eight hours or less, to accommodate customers' schedules with minimal disruption.

»» Situation

As the company grew over the course of several years, the management team began to see an increase in the number of quality defects and reduced efficiency in Season-4's production system. They thought these issues could be improved or eliminated with a new training program for front line supervisors.

Saibal Sengupta, executive vice president and chief operating officer, met Larry Alford, Georgia Manufacturing Extension Partnership (GaMEP) South Metro Atlanta region manager, at an industry roundtable event and contacted him a few months later to discuss the issues they were experiencing at the plant. Alford agreed there were some opportunities to provide training, but suggested starting with an assessment of the entire business operation to provide a more holistic analysis of the company's needs.



Since beginning their work with the GaMEP, Seasons-4 has:

- Created a problem solving culture in their production department allowing it to project a 10 percent improvement in overall efficiency over the next year.
- Reduced the number of quality problems logged by approximately 20 percent.
- Used the Job Methods model to reduce the amount of scrap wire at the wire cutting station by 10 percent, a nearly \$50,000 savings from just the first of many processes.

»» Solution

Alford and Mike Stonecipher, GaMEP project manager, spent two days at the plant talking with employees and collecting data. Using the Organizational Excellence framework, a GaMEP model that helps manufacturers pinpoint areas to allow for future growth, they then made recommendations to the management team based on their findings.

The first issue they tackled after the evaluation was the lack of daily communication between the staff on the plant floor and the management team. Alford and Stonecipher helped the team implement a daily Continuous Improvement (CI) walk.

The CI walk allows the plant manager, production manager, and a representative from every department in the office to walk the plant floor each day. They visit each of the nine workstations and go through a “daily improvement board” with the different team supervisors. The board has four sections, with every section’s content corresponding to one of the company’s improvement goals: safety, quality, target hours (a productivity metric), and an open area to record and address any miscellaneous problems on the production line. The team starts at the end of the line and walks backward toward the beginning of the production line so issues that are presented at the end, but are the result of challenges initiated earlier in the process, can be addressed during the same walk.

Initially, the Seasons-4 staff was skeptical and unsure the walk would be useful enough to warrant time taken away from their normal work duties. However, shortly after starting the daily walk, those opinions began to change. “The daily improvement walk creates a sense of responsibility and accountability. If there is a problem that I need to address, I make sure I take care of it and report back at the next walk with a solution or at least a progress report,” Sengupta said. “It has helped us solve problems much faster than we could have before, just by opening up the lines of communication.”

After implementing the board and walk, the types of training that supervisors needed became clearer based on feedback from the the team members on the floor. Alford brought in GaMEP project managers for a series of trainings including Job Methods, Safety, Relationship Skills, Problem Solving, and Training Techniques.

“The training that we did with GaMEP was different from others that we have done in the past. The quality of the instructors and the initial evaluation that helped them understand our company as a whole, made all the difference. We learned that to make training effective you have to find the gaps first, discuss it with leadership, and then work with the front line leaders to implement.”

– Saibal Sengupta, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer

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