

Silver Needle

Location: Kellogg, Idaho - Shoshone County
Project Area: Lean Manufacturing

Situation

In 1981, after nearly 100 years in the Silver Valley of Northern Idaho, the Bunker Hill Mining Company closed putting 2,700 people out of work. Brenda Stinson had spent 11 years at the Smelter making clothing to protect workers from heat. She started Silver Needle in 1979 as a home-based business sewing bags for the mine. When the mine shut down, Brenda and her husband Larry, another mine casualty, decided to make a go of it in the Valley by turning Silver Needle into a viable business. Today Silver Needle has 45 employees and is a respected producer of protective clothing sold nationwide. In October 2006, the company purchased a large building on three acres and created a factory designed to produce protective clothing of all kinds. As demand for product increased, lead times for certain items grew to unacceptable levels. Silver Needle asked TechHelp to assist with implementing Lean practices that could improve efficiency and lead times.

Solution

TechHelp Specialist, Gary Alvarado, worked with Silver Needle to develop a plant improvement plan that included the following:

- Trained all employees in Lean Principles & led an improvement project to decrease lead times and improve efficiencies on the manufacturing floor.
- Provided Lean Enterprise Certificate Program training for key personnel in order to create a core of Lean Technicians and internal Lean Champions.
- Conducted a Kaizen event designed to improve lead times and reduce redundancy.
- Provided change agent training and value stream mapping skills to supervisors so they could create, present and implement future state maps of product families.
- Provided ongoing coaching and mentoring to create a Lean culture.
- Conducted a work cell Kaizen of the 3015 garment family that incorporated standard work in progress and an inventory management Kanban system.

Results

- Lean helped reduce lead times, cycle times, rework and scrap.
- Lean helped improve on-time delivery and work cell efficiency.
- Lean created lead-time and other customer service improvements that helped the company retain sales of \$130K.
- Lean improvements led to the creation of 2 new jobs and retention of 20 employees.
- Lean created plant efficiencies that saved Silver Needle \$75K.
- Silver Needle made productive investments of \$195K to improve plant operations.
- Lean helped the company avoid \$130K in needless plant investment.
- Upgrading staff skills and creating a Lean operation led Silver Needle to be considered for a DuPont contract worth nearly \$2 million.
- Silver Needle's investment in Lean created a culture of continuous improvement that will help the company adapt to future growth and change.

"We continue to amaze ourselves at how we have evolved under the guidance of Gary Alvarado and TechHelp. Gary inspires us to embrace change. He champions our efforts to effectively engage employees to elicit the improvements we need to make along our Lean journey. He has become our mentor and our friend."

Renee Gilbert
Human Resources & Marketing
Manager, Silver Needle, Inc.



Simple but effective "Visual Workplace" tools are evidence of Lean implementation activities at Silver Needle

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