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Workshops Aim to Teach Principles of Lean Manufacturing

By Jennifer Sinsabaugh, Operations Director, New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership

Michael Tso was 10 months into his job running a high-tech envelope-making machine at Desert Paper and Envelope in Albuquerque when his employer sent him to the New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership's lean-manufacturing workshop this summer. There with other representatives of New Mexico companies he learned fundamentals of the lean manufacturing philosophy, which aims to improve business operations – and enhance competitiveness – from the shop floor to the front office.

Desert Paper and Envelope has eight machines that perform eight different functions, said Tso, who is one of only two Desert Paper machine operators that operate one of those specialty machines. While the 35-year-old company already has a smoothly functioning production line, Tso said he learned how to be “more productive and efficient without the extra steps you don't need to take. I enjoyed the workshop and I learned a lot.”

Lean Way of Thinking

The core of the lean manufacturing management philosophy is the idea that any resources not creating value for a customer in the form of a product or service are wasted. While the Toyota Production System (TPS) is a relatively modern example of lean management, improving efficiency in the production of goods and services is a centuries-old idea.

Based on the premise that a lean operation is a profitable operation, New Mexico MEP — part of a nationwide network of nonprofit centers coordinated by the Commerce Department's National Institute of Standards and Technology — helps managers and essential workers at New Mexico companies understand the principles of lean manufacturing through workshops, on-site training and systems analyses.

New Mexico MEP serves businesses throughout the state from its offices in Albuquerque, Roswell, Farmington and Las Cruces. Supported by federal, state and private funds, MEP provides experts in government, nonprofit organizations and industry who can help small and medium-sized companies become more competitive by showing how they can improve production processes, apply advanced technology and train workers to operate more efficiently.

Principles of Lean Manufacturing Workshops

MEP offers both public and private training sessions on the principles of lean manufacturing. The curriculum approaches training by simulating real-world situations, with MEP experts guiding participants through the transition from a traditional to a lean manufacturing environment, eliminating waste and increasing productivity in the process.

MEP principles are often applied to manufacturing industries, but the organization also teaches a workshop designed to eliminate unnecessary paperwork and procedures in offices and administrative settings. Besides efficiency training, New Mexico MEP conducts classes that teach supervisors how to relate to employees, including how to motivate them, resolve conflicts, reduce accidents, decrease equipment damage and increase product quality and quantity. Businesses can also use the Partnership for Success program, a free Internet-based library and email subscription service that provides technical background and business information.

MEP workshops have a nominal participation fee but funding options are available for qualifying businesses. For more information or to verify eligibility, call 505-262-0921 or visit www.newmexicomep.org.

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