

Brief

Stamping Ideas into Reality

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Climbing the Lean Stairway

The continuous improvement approach to manufacturing has been pervasive at Die-Tech since the company's creation in 1974. "We have always looked for ways to control costs and produce a finished product in a shorter time frame," relates Dave Hoover, Vice President of Manufacturing. By 2004 the company was applying formal Lean manufacturing initiatives throughout the plant.

In fact, the first newsletter article concerning Lean appeared during that year. So why, you may ask, are we still writing about it three years later? Hoover explains, "Lean manufacturing is a journey toward a destination that is never reached. Imagine yourself at the bottom of a stairway; as you climb the first few steps, you start to see the surface of steps higher up. This is how lean manufacturing works, as you climb you'll continue to recognize new opportunities."

This month Hoover attended a forum sponsored by the East Pennsylvania District of Precision Metalforming Association titled "Overcoming Obstacles to Lean Implementation."

Hoover hoped to learn more about barriers to success from other manufacturers, who are on the same Lean journey.

He was pleased to discover that Die-Tech is ahead of the curve compared to other manufacturers at the conference. While all the attendees had committed to Lean techniques, many were still in the initial stages -- just on the first few stairs so to speak. "The people side of Lean is the missing link and barrier for many of these manufacturers. At Die-Tech, we are developing a culture of respect and accountability to collect the ideas that exist in the heads of our employees. We challenge, involve and support our employees to contribute and make progress happen."

Hoover added that the Die-Tech Lean manufacturing initiative began with a clear vision to exceed customer expectations. "We know our customers really want our [commitment to make them a winning company](#). We listen like never before and figure out what value we bring to the table and how that value can be improved."

Die-Tech has many examples of how Lean initiatives have slashed costs and decreased lead-time. Hoover relates one of the most recent. Using a Lean tool called *value stream mapping* his staff identified all the events that take place within the plant once a customer order is placed through the finished product being shipped. They then determined which of those events in the process which added no value. After streamlining the process by eliminating the non-value-added activities, Hoover admits that cycle time was reduced by more than 50%. Thus allowing the faster response our [customers need to remain competitive](#) in the market place today.

"By seeking the voice of the customer and driving business processes by it, Die-Tech is mounting that stairway to continued success," Hoover asserts.

Are you on that Lean stairway and need a metal stamper to help you take the next step? Our Business Development Engineers are just a phone call away.

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