

# Connector

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## Let Go of Traditional Management Practices

The flood of statistical evidence showing reduced demand, lower production and diminished profits in the manufacturing sector makes many wonder whether manufacturing in the United States is a dying industry. But it is not. "It's an industry adapting to a downturn and changing world markets, says Richard Dennis, President of Die-Tech."

According to Dennis, survival in this recession will also require a new set of management skills. "The manufacturers who thrive will be those with leaders, and [supporting suppliers](#), who have the leadership skills to guide their companies through a recession."

Tim Zeigler, Vice President of Business Development at Die-Tech, is a strong advocate for education and he has, himself, earned management, six sigma and lean manufacturing certifications. Leadership, in his opinion, requires letting go of old traditional management practices and grasping a more empowering approach. Like the trapeze artist, leaders must learn when to hang on and when to let go.

Zeigler believes that employees are most productive when they are involved in decision making and more satisfied with their jobs when they understand their role in the manufacturing process. "If you really believe in a culture of continuous improvement, and you believe that your employees are indispensable in that process, let them know it by empowering them and by giving them the training and tools they need," Zeigler states.

When workers are given responsibility for results, Zeigler has seen it torque up their level of commitment. He cites two of many examples at Die-Tech.

Barry S.	ECN/ spare tooling delays	1
Don	Info is not always going to right press/tool/die Causes PM set-ups (Part #'s that run in multiple dies)	1
Barry S.	Need time to finish S-S PROJECT'S NOT complete - spare tools / C/O tools 100% etc. NOT done	2
Dick D.	PRESS II - Excess SPRAY FROM MI STEEL - OIL WASTE - CLEANUP TIME WASTE + SAFETY - TRIP HAZARD	1
Ryan	Rework parts being received into FG before parts are removed	1
Ryan	Shipping doesn't receive trailer for Outside Service Job	2
Jackie W.	New checklist for cleaning & Safety Press Room's W/H	3
Jackie & Judy	Need SS for auxiliary equipment for presses (rollers, unrollers, etc.)	2

Process flow maps are posted in each department in highly visible locations so that employees can see their contribution to a project and whether their department is within budget and on target for completion. If they are behind schedule, it is not unusual for workers to voluntarily stay until the job is done in order to meet a commitment to a customer.

And if you walked the production floor at Die-Tech, you would see white boards every where. Scribbled on these boards are [suggestions for improvement](#) which have been identified and championed by employees. They may be vendor problems, design enhancements, or rework issues. Cross-functional teams trained in process improvement tools analyze each issue, and once resolved it is immediately documented and communicated throughout the company.

Although not easy at first, Zeigler admits that letting go of control is one of the most important steps anyone can take as a manager. He has seen how successful employee involvement results in a leaner, more resourceful environment that sets the stage for the highest quality customer service.

Ready to let go of that stamper that doesn't understand how to help you thrive in this downturn?  
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