

Failure is Not an Option at Criterion



Founded in 1953 by Mike Ondercin as a general machine shop, third-generation owner, Tanya DiSalvo, shares how Criterion Tools and Die in Brookpark, Ohio, continuously improves in “No Failure” industries.

PMPA: When did you begin to work at Criterion Tools and Die?

TD: I was in sales for another company and when a sales position opened up at Criterion in 1998, I applied and got the job. I spent a year in the shop learning what I could without losing any fingers. In addition to learning how the shop floor worked, I learned how much I enjoy making stuff and I was able to get involved with the fabric of how things got done at Criterion. Over time, I was able to morph into operations so my dad could actually take a two week vacation. In 2007, we created a game plan so that by 2010, I was the owner.

PMPA: What is Criterion's niche?

TD: We started adding capacity with Swiss machines. Then the parts became more complex as we started to specialize and serve the medical device, aerospace, defense and photonics industries — highly engineered, tight-tolerance and aesthetically pleasing parts. We make parts the size of the screw that holds your eyeglasses together to the size of a softball — turning and small complex parts. Plus we handle lower volumes.

PMPA: What makes you proud about Criterion?

TD: We are small but we are mighty in that we spend time investing in our people. I want them trained and happy. I not only want their hands doing the tasks that what we need them to do, but I want their brains engaged so we can get even better at doing what we are doing. We are in a high-standard industry so we need to expect high-standards with every job, and it needs to be done the same way, every time. It's important that everyone is trustworthy, reliable, dependable and all working as a team.

Even though it is difficult to find the right people to hire, we have gone from hiring someone and just putting them on a machine



Criterion owner, Tanya DiSalvo (left) works with Dorothy Bettis on the shop floor.

to an onboarding process. Our onboarding process includes training, written procedures, the opportunity to talk to different people and improved communication. We have a training board set up so each employee can see the process flow. I think it's important that our employees understand how and why we do what we do. We also have an ongoing training to put all of our documents into a software system so anyone can go to the workstation at anytime and access a needed process; if a process has to be repeated, there is a written, documented process that can be accessed. Additionally, we are striving for an environment where it is safe to ask questions and get answers.

PMPA: Do you use any special tools to help with continuous improvement?

TD: Yes. We use the Velocity Scheduling System based on the book, *The Goal* by Eliyahu M. Goldratt. The book points out that a job is only as fast as its slowest person/process. It helps us focus on finishing, starting more work, cutting work-in-process in half, driving cross-training, and focusing on where we need people to be. We followed a 12-week program by Dr. Lisa Lang which is an eight step program that focuses on people, process and equipment. We started this program because at one point, even though

we were not as busy as we had been, we were working a lot of overtime on jobs we shouldn't have been because we had internal issues. With 150 years of experience on the shop floor, we couldn't figure out why this was happening and how we could do it differently. The 12-week program helped us figure out how to solve this problem. I think it worked because we had to do one step at a time and it didn't allow us to skip steps. We learned how to manage our resources: people, process and equipment. We started managing the shop floor differently which also allowed us to take on higher volume production jobs. We don't just run parts, we run processes.

PMPA: What do you do to become a better manager/owner?

TD: I talk to everyone. I ask, “What makes you successful?” and scoop up whatever falls out of their head. At first, I wanted to tackle all of the problems and learn everything about everything. It didn't take long to realize that was going to be too much. The lesson I learned can be summed up with this analogy — if you are on a plane where the pilot is serving drinks, you are on the wrong plane. I needed to focus. I want to be the generation that lifts the company up even more. I want to be able to move into the realm of significance so that we are able to give back. I want to be able to encourage our future workforce.

PMPA: Why do you value your PMPA membership?

TD: I am constantly amazed with the ListServe and the volume of information that is shared. It's fantastic and people talk and share and take the time to answer! I am fascinated still to this day — all different topics and from all across the country — its a great, great tool.