

Improvement Starts in the Men's Room

Dan Ignasiak, owner of SEPCO-Erie in Erie Pennsylvania, wanted to improve the productivity and efficiency of his shop, so he started with the men's room and implemented process and a new way of thinking.

PMPA: What inspired the desire for continuous improvement?

DI: It started with the book *2 Second Lean* by Paul Akers. We have put our own spin on the concepts, but the basic ideas are based on that book.

PMPA: Why did you start your continuous improvement in the men's room?

DI: I thought it was a small space that needed to be organized and required processes for maintenance so it would be a good place to start. We implemented the three "S's": Sweep, Sort, and Standardize. We have a rotating schedule for cleaning and it started with me. I think because I was invested and willing to do the cleaning, the employees took it seriously. We have a kaizen system for the supplies with labels, a cleaning process with task pictures, instructions and a QR code as well as pictures of what the space is supposed to look like. Once we, as a company, got that in place and it was working, I knew I could take the concepts to the shop floor.

PMPA: You have a daily meeting with all your employees. How does that work? .

DI: For 10-15 minutes every working day, all the employees gather and have a quick update on improvements, engineering, maintenance, and quality. During the meetings, improvements that the employees make are highlighted and the employee explains the problem and the solution as before and after pictures are shown. The basic concept is to fix what bugs you. Since we have started this process, we have addressed over 450 safety and efficiency issues. Every employee is

also encouraged to share what they are grateful for; it is important to remember the good things in your life. The meeting is the key to sustaining the improvements.

PMPA: What was your biggest challenge to start the lean concepts?.

DI: The biggest challenge when starting something new is always people. I learned how important it is to find the right people and to fire the wrong people quicker. Before this process, if there was an employee who couldn't get the job done, we would drag our feet hoping it would get better, but it never got better. By the time we let them go other employees would say how glad they were that the person was gone. So why wait? It's easier to quickly fire the people who don't fit before it becomes a bigger issue.

PMPA: How did the new system affect problem-solving?

DI: It is easy to blame the operator when something goes wrong. We learned that determining the cause of the problem is usually somewhere in the process. The last one to blame is the operator and it almost never gets that far. Even if the blame does land on the operator, they own up to it and we can fix the problem and move on. We have found that problems can get solved faster and more efficiently if we look at the process first. It's also important to recognize an issue instead of ignoring it. Ignoring it is easy and doesn't take any time, but in the long run, it pays off to recognize the issue and take the time to solve the problem.



Dan Ignasiak gave a tour of SEPCO-Erie to the PMPA Technical Program Committee

PMPA: Your dad started the company. What was a lesson you learned from him?

DI: I admire my dad and all that he did to build this company. There are two lessons that still stick with me. The first is that I am not that important and if someone is waiting for me, I need to go meet with them. The second came from a purchase of a Brown and Sharpe that he wasn't expecting. Instead of getting upset, he said we would make it work. And we did. We still have that machine on the shop floor.

PMPA: Why do you value your PMPA membership?

DI: The networking with PMPA members and staff is very valuable to me. I have made a lot of great friends in the industry as well as a lot of valuable connections to help my business. **PMPA**