

# How VIBCO Achieved Lean

## Achieving Lean

Karl Wadensten is a self-proclaimed “lean zealot” and will be presenting a session called Achieving Lean at PMPA’s National Technical Conference April 14-16 at the Greater Columbus Convention Center in Columbus, Ohio. In his session, Mr. Wadensten will discuss how to get serious about leading sustainable, lean improvement. The session will touch on how vision and culture define organizations and the profound impact that ingrained lean thinking can have over the long haul.

VIBCO Vibrators, founded in 1962, manufactures and markets a comprehensive range of industrial and construction vibrators. VIBCO also designs, manufactures and markets a complete line of vibratory plate compactors and rollers.

VIBCO is committed to quality, innovation and producing a complete product portfolio that is 100 percent made in the USA. The company produces 1,300 different products and 6,800 component pieces with fast order turnaround due to its achievement of lean manufacturing and continuous manufacturing improvement. VIBCO operates with the mantra, “Same day. Next day,” which means making the product from start to finish in 24 hours and in 48 hours, it’s out to the customer.

“Our journey to lean manufacturing started with our machine shop. It was our bottleneck but also our pacemaker,” explained Karl Wadensten, president of VIBCO Vibrators. “We wanted to be lean as well as have predictability, high quality and confidence. To do that, we needed to move out of the ‘more is better,’ batch-and-queue mindset and figure out how to make one thing in a highly efficient way, with single-piece flow in a quantity of one.”

To identify areas for improvement, VIBCO started recording the production processes in its shop of 16 machines. The VIBCO team sat down and dissected hundreds of hours of video identifying ways to set up, standardize and overcome challenges to having more variety in production. One of the largest changes that VIBCO made to achieve lean manufacturing was to produce smaller batches using SMED. SMED is a methodology developed by Toyota for quick changeover and stands for: single-minute exchange of die.

“Smaller batches along the entire value stream allow for better planning and scheduling as well as being able to have shorter turnaround time,” continued Mr. Wadensten. “In just a few years, we went from completing 40 or 50 set ups for jobs to completing 400 to 500 set ups for jobs in the same 21- to 22-day cycle, which is a true game changer.”

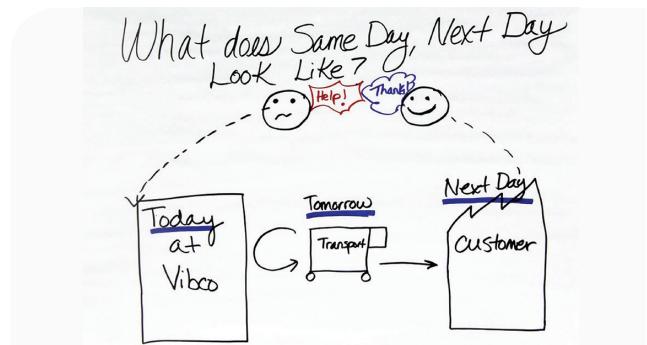
VIBCO started its journey toward lean manufacturing by incorporating SMED into manufacturing. Eventually, the entire way of thinking at VIBCO changed.

“SMED was effective in working toward our goals, but the mentality in the shop is no longer SMED,” said Mr. Wadensten. “The question is now, ‘how do we produce this without any set up? We got out of our own way and away from being held hostage by the set up and traditional manufacturing processes. We also set the target for future conditions very high, so high that most would think it’s unattainable. That is true lean!”

“Thinking about things differently and taking the lessons that we learned about our own manufacturing and applying them to each step in the process are a major part of success toward achieving lean manufacturing,” Mr. Wadensten continued. “When it all boils down, what we did was process improvement, collaborating, seeing the same vision and having a true battle cry.”

Mr. Wadensten recommends starting the journey toward achieving lean manufacturing by grasping the shop’s situation, observing the current processes and listening to the team on the shop floor.

“Go out, look and listen. You can’t lead from your office. Your team can tell you what’s getting in their way and the challenges that they face. Ask them, ‘what’s bugging you?’ Supporting your own people so that they can excel at their jobs will increase efficiency,” said Mr. Wadensten. “Listen to what they say and act on it to break down the barriers.



CONTINUES ON PAGE 6

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

## How VIBCO Achieved Lean

“Also listen to your customers. What do they want? When do they want it? Customers don’t want the excuses that seem to be the flavor of today,” Mr. Wadensten continued. “Be different. Provide a product or service. Not a story.”

The lean processes that VIBCO incorporates and continues to improve, cleared bottlenecks and set a quicker pace

so that they can offer quality products that are ready to ship exactly when they are needed and in the right quantities.

*VIBCO is located at 75 Stilson Road, Wyoming, Rhode Island 02898. Phone: 800-633-0032. Fax: 401-539-2584.*

**Website: [vibco.com](http://vibco.com).**

## RECENT PMPA LISTSERVE TOPICS

PMPA members support one another through email Listserves, where they can solve problems, share advice, sell excess material and equipment, and learn about new developments and opportunities. Here is a list of topics that were recently discussed:

- Indexing oil prices
- Paint vendor
- Skills gap
- Planning a new shop space
- Survey results: Weekly vs. monthly pay periods
- OSHA 300A summary
- Sources for ring gages
- Heat treat troubleshooting
- Heat treating size changes
- Chrome plating
- Is 360 brass RoHS exempt?
- Induction annealing brass
- Supplier needed for AISI 1040 or 1045 steel, small diameters
- Supplier needed for 1095 steel
- 303 Stainless turns dark from passivation
- 00-90 Thread ring gages, source
- Machining 17-4 PH (630)
- Zinc plating leaded steels
- Copper 151 extra hard
- Short cycle overheating on gang tool lathe
- C79800 Machinability ratings
- O-Ring source
- Steel tube suppliers
- Looking for a linear vibratory feeder unit
- Long parts positive stop

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### PMPA CALENDAR

Below is the calendar of upcoming conferences and events scheduled for the 2013 program year. For the latest district/chapter meeting information, please view the Calendar of Events at [pmpa.org/calendar/](http://pmpa.org/calendar/). If you have questions about PMPA conferences or regional meetings, please contact: Rob Kiener, Director of Government Affairs & Communications: 440-526-0300 or [rkiener@pmpa.org](mailto:rkiener@pmpa.org).

#### National Technical Conference

April 14-16, 2013  
Greater Columbus Convention Center  
Columbus, Ohio

#### Precision Machining Technology Show

April 16-18, 2013  
Greater Columbus Convention Center  
Columbus, Ohio

#### Annual Meeting

October 18-22, 2013  
Hotel Del Coronado  
Coronado (San Diego), Calif.



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