

The Willington Companies Lean Transformation Becomes a Bonus to All Employees

The Willington Companies, headquartered in Stafford Springs, CT manufacturers' nameplates, decals, labels and large format graphics for thousands of companies throughout the US and around the world. They've been helping companies to identify, brand and/or promote their product or service for more than 43 years. They are very proud of their history, culture and reputation that have contributed to its stability and growth. They are committed to the success of its customers by being flexible, responsive, dependable and fast.

The Willington Companies began their Lean Journey in September of 2007 with the help of Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology (CCAT) Aerospace and Defense Initiative (ADI Funding) and CL&P PRIME Lean Funding. The Willington Companies developed a partnership with Leanovations, LLC, an internationally recognized consulting company from Plainville, CT, who is a registered ADI Lean service provider, and a Certified PRIME Lean Provider, as their "Lean Sensei" and business coaches to assist in their Lean transformation, and the results have been remarkable. Not only are the customers benefitting from shorter lead-times, better quality and on-time delivery, the company distributed two bonuses to all employees since the journey began.

"Using Lean as a "growth strategy" appealed to us," says Mike Goepfert; General Manager and 2nd generation leader of this family business. "We asked every person in the company to attend ½ Day Lean Fundamentals Training by Leanovations. Everyone in the company is consistently looking for the 7 Lean Wastes as defined by TPS (Toyota Production System) and identifying opportunities for improvement. The elimination of waste allows us to better serve our customers and frees up existing resources to meet our growth plans for the business without significant expense."

Mike and his Leadership Team have committed the company to a monthly drum beat of Kaizen (Continuous Improvement) events. Leanovations has provided instructions on the Lean Fundamentals introducing Lean Concepts from the Toyota Production System. The monthly Kaizen events allow teams to practice the concepts while making dramatic improvements in target areas within the company. Some results just after the first 9 months include a 23% reduction in Inventory, on-time delivery increased from mid-high 70's% to consistently around 95%, and inventory turns have increased 29% on sales that consistently beats the business plan.

"Leanovations coaching and teaching methods has provided a solid foundation for our success" says Kevin Malanczuk, Director of Operations and Controller, "The Nerf Ball Factory exercise they conduct provided a safe, quick, way for all participants to see and eliminate the 7 wastes and provide Lean terminology we all speak now, such as; Standard Work, Flow, Takt Time and KPI's".

"People are energized," says Jeff Dwyer, Production Manager, "Management no longer has to select the monthly kaizen events, and the Team Leaders are now selecting Kaizen events in their departments. This is the result of working lunch meetings by our Team Leaders and others, where Management provides guidance only."



The Willington Companies have also invested in developing Internal Lean Experts and Leaders, by sending two key employees, Mark Rainaud and Jessica Mitchell, to a “Lean Leadership Certification Program” developed by Leanovations, in support of CCAT’s objective to develop Internal Lean Experts at Connecticut Manufacturers, where normal ADI approval process applies. At a recent Kaizen event, Mark Rainaud watched a team develop a prototype of a new material/supply cart, where everything necessary to begin the next job came kitted for the press operator. Mark states “One thing we have learned is quick and simple solutions today beat complicated ones that take years or never get implemented. There was a working prototype cart on the floor today!” Jessica Mitchell, being relatively new to the company, Jessica says, “This was one of the most rewarding and eye opening experiences I have had, it was exciting to be part of a team that has so much input in helping the organization develop the right performance goals and metrics”.

One of the things that sets The Willington Companies apart from others is they will close the whole factory down (60+ employees), on Friday morning to attend the teams final Lean presentation. The Willington Companies usually have 2 teams with 5-7 members on a team which means they will invest 15-25% of their workforce on the Kaizen Event, one week a month, which has created 100% of the workforce truly engaged in Lean every single day. After the teams make their presentations, there is a celebration lunch for the total organization and afterwards, they will go to the Gemba and visually see the teams accomplishments. The whole Lean presentation and celebration will take 2-3 hours, where all 60+ employees are involved and engaged. “This really makes The Willington Companies a model of how to change the entire culture” states Fred Shamburg, President of Leanovations, “The Willington Companies honor the TPS Kaizen process and understand it is more about engaging the people then implementing the tools. The Lean tools need to support the people to reach their goals, not the people supporting the tools.”

“The Willington Companies is very employee focused and we believe that teamwork, training and strategic awareness is the key to our success.” Says Lynn Dwyer, Human Resource Manager, “and we will continue to develop and work with our employees to enhance their skills to compete globally”.

For any additional information on The Willington Companies products, services or their Lean journey, please feel free to contact:

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