If I Wrote a Letter to Santa

by Bob Zaruta, President/CEO, NWIRC

Taking the cue from a popular holiday song, “Grown-Up Christmas List”, I was considering the things that would be on my list if I were writing a letter to Santa this year. Aside from the obvious choices we would all ask for, like ‘healthy family’ and ‘world peace’, here are a few things I would consider on a professional level to help our region’s economy.

Dear Santa,

I know you have a lot to manage, so allow me to give you a little background and update. I lead an organization that exists to help manufacturers improve their competitiveness, achieve operational excellence, and grow profitably. Like you, I have a highly skilled staff that works relentlessly, with incredible passion and dedication, every day throughout the year to serve others. Also like your team, we’re focused on getting the job done and meeting or exceeding expectations even among issues and challenges. Last year, we were ‘good boys and girls’. In fact, according to Project Impact Surveys sponsored by the U.S. Department of Commerce and conducted by an independent research firm, NWIRC’s clients reported that our 2015 projects accounted for $22.7M in new sales, $9.8M in retained sales, $4.7M in cost savings, and $8.9M for reinvestments in plant and equipment. NWIRC clients also reported that our projects last year created and retained 396 jobs.

Manufacturers in our region face many challenges, including 1) implementing cost reduction strategies and building a culture of continuous improvement, 2) diversifying their business and successfully entering new markets, and 3) recruiting, developing and retaining the workforce that the future demands. With production facilities of your own at the North Pole, I’m sure you can relate to these and other critical business issues and problems that our manufacturers encounter.

So Santa, my wish for this Christmas as 2016 comes to a close, is that the manufacturing industry in our 13-county region becomes bigger and stronger. I hope that the focus on growing manufacturing we’ve seen in recent campaigning stays in the spotlight with law- and policymakers in order to get the results that our local, state, and national economies need. And lastly, I’d like manufacturers to find their way to NWIRC for support in driving their profitable growth, whether through training, business planning, or technology-related projects. We can help with initiatives on their wish list for this coming year and beyond. And Santa, if you are having any issues in your North Pole production facilities, you can call upon us for assistance too!

Happy Holidays to All!

Challenges for Leaders in Developing a Lean Culture

by Jerry Sobrowski, Six Sigma Master Black Belt

Culture is often defined as a set of rules and standards shared by members of an organization, which – when acted upon by the members – produce behavior that falls within a range that the organization considers proper and acceptable.

A lean organization fosters a company culture in which all employees continually improve their skill levels and production processes.

The challenges of establishing and sustaining a Lean culture can be viewed similar to the stages of team development. Psychologist Bruce Tuckman first came up with the memorable phrase “forming, storming, norming, and performing” in his 1965 article, “Developmental Sequence in Small Groups.” He used it to describe the path that most teams follow on their way to high performance. The same can be said about organizations as they embark on their journey to a high performance lean culture.

Forming

In this stage, people in the organization are anywhere from anxious about the new initiative...
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to excited about what lies ahead. As a leader, you play a dominate role in this stage by assuring the goals and standards of excellence are communicated and that you have developed an implementation plan that addresses both the technical elements and organizational development aspects of a Lean implementation.

Storming
Here, people typically want to push back or challenge the initiative. You can actively involve others and create the mutual respect needed to sustain this extraordinary effort by striving to create an atmosphere of trust and human dignity. Work on making each person feel capable and powerful. Identify the major barriers that need to be overcome in order to achieve the Lean vision, and help everyone move past those barriers. Make sure people have the tools needed to do the job!

Norming
At this point, most have bought into the initiative. Start small. While Lean may seem like a radical shift, the dynamics of successful Lean transformation rely on continuous small pushes on the flywheel of change, creating momentum, and a cultural movement. Use Lean Thinking to look for innovative ways to improve the organization. Experiment and take risks. Risk taking involves mistakes and failures. Accept the inevitable disappointments as learning opportunities.

Performing
Make adjustments and develop a plan to sustain the efforts and to continue to make an impact. Continue to breathe life into the Lean vision and get people to see exciting possibilities for the future. Keep hope and determination alive, recognize contributions that individuals make. Celebrate accomplishments and make people feel like heroes.

Tuckman later added a fifth stage called “Adjourning”. No, we are not talking about stopping – on the contrary. Accomplishing extraordinary things is hard work and the last thing you want to do is stop. As a leader you are responsible for encouraging the hearts of others, and for keeping the vision alive. Your challenge here is to continue to nurture an atmosphere of trust and human dignity, where others feel comfortable to challenge the status quo, and achieve extraordinary results.

Jerry Sobrowski is a Six Sigma Master Black Belt and spent most of his career at LORD Corporation. He holds Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees from Gannon University.

Working Group Forming to Support Lean Culture

NWIRC is forming an operational excellence working group with the goal of helping companies who are looking to create and/or sustain a Lean culture. No matter where your company falls in the process of Lean manufacturing, this program will provide a collaborative learning environment where companies can share and learn from each other.

Manufacturers who implement Lean can see terrific results after their initial training and running some key events. But, then comes a plateau and it becomes harder to maintain that momentum to see additional progress. Lean Together™ is a working group designed to be an ongoing enrichment program to help companies learn how to engage everyone at the organization. The 2-hour, semi-structured, sessions will be based on concepts found in the popular book, 2 Second Lean, by Paul A. Akers. In the book, Akers provides inspiration for making lean manufacturing easy, fun, and results producing. Each participant of the group will receive the book and engage in ‘book club’ style discussions regarding its’ content. The group will help tailor topics for the stand-up education segments of the program. Sessions will also include plant tours, live team meetings, and sharing of best practices, all facilitated by an accomplished Lean and Six Sigma Black Belt expert.

The Lean Together™ working group will consist of non-competing companies and meet monthly on the third Tuesday of the month (excluding July and August). The first session, on January 17, 2017, will serve as a kick-off meeting Continued on Page 3
The Basics of ADM-IP

The Advanced Diversified Manufacturing Industry Partnership (ADMIP) is an employer-driven collaborative aimed at advancing the manufacturing industry in the region through work-force training and development, pipeline enhancement, and advocacy initiatives. ADMIP encompasses six counties in northwest Pennsylvania — Erie, Crawford, Forest, Clarion, Warren and Venango — and brings together regional employers, economic developers, labor leaders, and educators to improve the competitiveness of businesses and organizations sharing similar products and services.

One of the greatest values of the Partnership is that it reduces duplication of training by better coordinating the efforts between training providers. The program also provides a state subsidy of up to 50 percent for training, on a first-come, first-served basis, for eligible employers.

Along with training the current work-force, the ADMIP is equally focused on filling the pipeline with skilled, career-ready individuals. Partnership members say recruiting students early and often — at functions such as MFG Day, RoboBots, Career Camps and the NTMA’s manufacturing student clubs — and getting employers better connected with the technical schools, high schools, and middle schools, is critical to bridging the skills gap in manufacturing careers.

The effort includes shifting the way the technical educational system is viewed. The goal of the strategic plan is to get parents and students to embrace the message that technical education is for those who excel and want to pursue a path that prepares them for both gainful employment and a degree-awarding institution.

Tami Adams, a member of the ADMIP Steering Committee and Executive Director of the NWPA Chapter of the NTMA, says it is important to participate and get involved. “Every organization working to promote manufacturing in NWPA is doing great things,” she states, “but if we don’t know what the other is doing, we are wasting resources.” Adams has been actively involved in the Partnership since its inception and believes it is the best it has been in recent years when industry has been given the leeway to drive the decisions, not funding streams. “The synergy between organizations is very positive right now,” she says. “We have a great core group actively involved with the ADMIP and we can make things happen.”

Joy Sherry, Director of Organizational Development and Learning for Ainsworth Pet Nutrition, said their organization has benefited from the Partnership since 2008. “The company and our employees have benefited directly from the training, networking, and advocacy efforts of the Partnership in numerous ways,” she said. Some of the benefits cited include: 1) use of Career Ladders and Lattices developed for manufacturing and sales positions; 2) networking with other manufacturers to identify opportunities for coordination of training providers, recruitment, and assistance with Human Resource policies; 3) ability to publicize our opportunities through Tech Fest, RoboBots and other youth forums to build interest in manufacturing as a career, and 4) training subsidies to make training our employees more affordable.

There is no cost to be a member of ADMIP, but a participation rate of 75% is required. Monthly meetings are held on a rotating basis throughout the region with the ability to participate by conference call and are facilitated by Partners for Performance.

To learn more and become a member, visit http://madeinnwpa.org.

Is It Time for a STEM Intern?

Through the STEM Manufacturing Internship Program, NWIRC facilitates identifying, screening, and selecting a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) college student for a manufacturers’ project. The program has helped companies accelerate technology development and address process and technology-related issues with significant and quantifiable results, like increased productivity and decreased costs. NWIRC currently has a robust database of student resumes collected from Fall career fairs and through our website portal. Spring and Summer may seem distant, but students will soon be considering their internship opportunities. Now is the optimal time to match project requirements and objectives with the ideal student’s skill-set and work interests. Contact Program Coordinator, Gretchen Reinard for more information at (814) 898-6887 or visit www.nwirc.org for a schedule of 15-minute webinar briefings about the program.
YOUR STRATEGIC BUSINESS ADVISORS

If you have questions, or would like to speak with someone from NWIRC about services, please contact your Strategic Business Advisor:

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814.590.5202  
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Ed Barthelmes  
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Erie & Warren Counties

Wishing you the joys of the season  
and a very prosperous New Year!

UPCOMING EVENTS

ISO/TS 16949  
Internal Audit  
December 6-8  
Location: Corry  
ISO/TS 16949 is the quality management system standard for companies working within the automotive industry. If you are certified or looking to become certified, this course provides a thorough review, instructs participants how to conduct an internal audit, and more.

ISO 9001:2015  
Internal Audit  
January 17-19  
Location: Erie  
This 3-day workshop will provide a detailed review of the quality standard, including the most recent changes. Participants will learn how to conduct an internal audit, write the audit report, and take corrective actions.

LinkedIn for Manufacturers  
February 23  
Location: Erie  
March 1  
Location: Clarion  
Hands-on workshop to create the ideal profile and target new connections. Learn how to share useful information, generate leads, keep tabs on your industry, and use this powerful network as a sales and marketing tool. This is a great session for senior leadership.

Apply Six Sigma Tools Now for Big Results  
February 22  
Location: Erie  
Small organizations may not have the resources (time, people, and money) for Six Sigma and the training required. Learn how to leverage basic elements of the DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, and Control) methodology of Six Sigma without significant investments and bearing the expense of training belts.

For more information or to register for training, visit www.nwirc.org