Positive Impact of Student Interns

by Bob Zaruta, President/CEO, NWIRC

With summer almost here, many college and university students have already started their summer internships (or will be soon). For many manufacturing companies in our region, hosting a summer intern isn’t just about giving a student more experience in their field of study. Hosting an intern can also mean impact for their company, but finding the right fit isn’t always easy.

For more than 5 years now, NWIRC has served as a matchmaker between manufacturers and students who are studying in the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and math). Throughout the year, our Manufacturing Technology Engineer/STEM Internship Project Manager visits career fairs in the region- talking with students and enhancing our database with available students, their capabilities, and their interest in doing a project-based internship. Our Strategic Business Advisors meet with manufacturers on a regular basis identifying their challenges and needs. Sometimes those needs point to potential benefits from having a student intern, and if that is the case, we match the company’s objectives with the ideal student’s skill-set and interests.

A student intern can help a company move an old project forward, with a process improvement initiative, or accelerate technology adoption. We know there is impact for the companies where interns are placed via their direct feedback and also from the results they are reporting of cost savings, as well as sales increases. One of the most recent companies we assisted sent a note thanking NWIRC for our initial legwork for their intern search. He noted that in the past their company used the normal path of various school posting systems without much success and that all the candidates we presented were well qualified. Every company knows the time and cost involved in vetting the right candidate, whether for a full-time employee or an intern.

The other benefit that companies are reaping is the opportunity to hire the intern after their term is complete or upon graduation. Many have expressed that they hope to or have hired their student intern, while others are sometimes disappointed to learn that the student plans to leave the area. Many factors are out of your control as to their decision for leaving the region. But, you can control their experience while at your company- such as your company culture and providing the intern with fulfilling work to keep them engaged. Just something to consider if you are hosting a student intern this summer.

Onex Inc: Embracing the Domino Effect of 2 Second Lean

Onex, Inc. was first introduced to lean manufacturing several years ago when they started working with NWIRC and lean expert, Craig Corsi, on a value stream mapping project. Corsi facilitated a five-day on-site project that ultimately led to their decision to move to another facility better suited for their needs. One of the red flags during the project was the amount of wasted motion (steps) for doing work. Finding a new facility and relocating was quite an undertaking, but once settled in their new space, President, Ashleigh Walters, knew there were opportunities for greater efficiencies.

Walters knew the successes of companies who previously participated in Lean Together™, a program created by NWIRC. Lean Together™ is an ongoing collaborative learning program focused on developing true and lasting cultural changes, where everyone’s job is making small incremental improvements- everyday. The program includes nine monthly sessions of classroom education, facility tours, 2 Second Lean book discussions, and assignments. Walters and her team were onboard to get Onex started with Lean Together 1.0.

Employees Mike Bliel, Production Supervisor and Leanne Crail, Laborer and Welder, were the program champions, attending the monthly sessions and responsible for homework assignments and brining the information back for the rest of
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the team. One of the early sessions of the Lean Together™ program focuses on the importance of regular meetings, reviewing important content to cover, and tips for running effective ‘stand-up’ meetings. Companies are then given an assignment to start brief meetings if they aren’t already doing them. Onex determined that their standard agenda for each meeting would include: 1) What bugs you?, 2) a safety tip, 3) quality issues (mistakes), 4) company education, 5) upcoming work, 6) compliments, and 7) assignments for the next week. All employees rotate presenting various agenda items that are planned in advance and displayed on a calendar. During the meeting, the ‘What bugs you?’ items are added to a poster noting the individual who will be responsible to focus on the improvement.

For Mike Bliel, cleanliness and organization is a big thing, and historically, hard to maintain for more than a couple days. But by working together, their team came up with solutions to make it easier to sustain organization, like putting up shadow boards and creating special holders for tools so everything has a place. They organized standard gang boxes for the employees who work at a customer’s jobsite. These giant tool boxes now consist of all the same tools with a visible checklist of everything contained inside. This type of visual lessens the risk of something being left behind, which ultimately reduces the cost of having to either return to a jobsite for the tool or having to replace a lost tool altogether. At first, Bliel didn’t think attending Lean Together was going to be a fit for Onex, but he’s changed his mind. “At my first meeting for Lean Together, I was thinking ‘what did I get into, this won’t work for us’. But, after learning more about 2 Second Lean, it’s awesome! It’s a way of thinking to improve and work together as a team. These ideas can work for anyone. Just like any change, there are struggles in the beginning to get everyone onboard but for us it happened quickly,” he said. Onex initially started their weekly meetings with discussion about 2 Second Lean, in order to build some momentum. Each week, someone was assigned a chapter and then summarized the information during the meeting. The office staff soon saw the benefits and wanted to get involved, so they started listening to the audio book version and came up with their own improvements. All the departments are now working together and at the end of the day, all areas are clean and in order.

Walters said, “everyone now has a better understanding of how their job impacts their co-workers, the company as a whole, and our customers. “The key to success is for owners or executives of companies to give employees the support and time needed for the program. It will then create a domino effect throughout the organization.” Lean Together facilitator, Craig Corsi, said, “Onex has embraced the true essence of the program by growing their people through company and industry education, creating individual employee development plans, and by paying it forward for other companies to learn about their journey.” As far as overall impact of Lean Together™, Onex has seen an increase in gross margins that they attribute partially to their improved efficiencies. They are also optimistic about future sales. “The shop shows really well when we have visitors and I think that makes a big difference in a client’s view of Onex as a supplier,” said Walters. There is no doubt that continuous improvement is now ingrained in Onex’s culture.

Hileman Named Chair of Western PA Chapter of WiM

Susan Hileman, NWIRC Strategic Business Advisor (SBA), was recently named Chair of the Western PA Chapter of Women in Manufacturing (WiM). WiM is dedicated to supporting, promoting, and inspiring women who are pursuing or have chosen a career in the manufacturing industry. WiM encompasses manufacturers of all types and welcomes individuals from every job function – from the shop floor to the C-Suite. As an SBA with NWIRC, Hileman assists manufacturers, who are located in Mercer, Venango, Forest, and Clarion Counties, along with the Titusville area, with business growth opportunities.
Lean Together Cohorts are Now Forming

A new cohort for Lean Together 1.0 is starting up in July. Now is the time to get on board if your company has been struggling to get continuous improvement initiatives started or to keep the momentum going in the right direction. For many, it’s a challenge to keep all the employees engaged. Lean Together is a 9-month collaborative learning program focused on developing true and lasting cultural changes, where everyone’s job is making small incremental improvements, everyday. Sessions are facilitated by lean expert, Craig Corsi, and include facility tours, discussion focused on the book 2 Second Lean by Paul Akers, and company-specific onsite assistance. Cohorts for Lean Together 2.0 and Lean Together Advanced will also be starting up in July for companies who participated in the previous programs. For more details, contact Molly Reichard at (814) 217-6067.

ARC PA MAKES Mini-Grant Program

The ARC PA MAKES Mini-Grant Program, funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), is designed to assist the coal impacted community’s response to negative economic factors. Assistance focuses on diversifying and growing small and medium sized manufacturers through strategic efforts to build capacity, improve efficiencies and demand locally, stimulate job creation, and drive economic impact.

Grant funds can be used for the implementation of Advanced Manufacturing Technology (AMT), as well as business growth services. AMT is the use of new process/materials to do things faster, cheaper and with higher quality results. This can include technologies for continuous improvement and leveraging access to high speed internet to reach new customers or markets, receive orders, collaborate on new designs, share information, track orders, and/or monitor equipment and productivity. It can also include technologies to manage risks such as cyber threats, as well as disruptive technologies such as additive manufacturing. Business growth services includes projects such as lead generation, market intelligence, and strategic planning.

Applicants may request a grant up to 33% of the total project cost from a minimum of $1,000 up to a maximum of $10,000 (website development and website related projects are limited to a maximum grant award of $5,000). Eligible companies need to work with NWIRC to complete the technical assessment and assistance process. You can find additional eligibility requirements at www.nwirc.org or contact Gerry Schneggenburger at gschneggs@nwirc.org for more information.

Manufacturers Participate in Harrisburg Roundtable

A group of manufacturing leaders from across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania recently met with the General Assembly of the Manufacturing Caucus to participate in a roundtable discussion. The purpose of the session was for attendees to share their stories of growing their businesses and creating jobs, as well as discussing their current challenges and future opportunities. Directors from the Pennsylvania Industrial Resource Centers, including Northwest Industrial Resource Center (NWIRC), also attended the meeting. Members of the Caucus had the opportunity to observe a robotics demonstration, highlighting the importance of technology for manufacturing companies to grow and become more competitive.

Those attending from northwestern PA include (see photo): (front, L-R) John Thigpen, President of Ilsco Extrusions; Elisabeth Smith, President/CEO of Acutec Precision Aerospace; Carolyn Newhouse, Executive Director of Bradford Area Alliance; Robert Zaruta, President/CEO of NWIRC; Susan Hileman, Strategic Business Advisor for NWIRC; (Back, L-R) Bob Hill, President of Solar Atmospheres; Will Knecht, Chairman of Wendell August Forge; Brent Ward, President of Integrated Fabrication; Ashleigh Walters, President of Onex Inc; and Don Smith, COO of Franklin Industries.

ESOP and Panel Discussion

As a follow up to Succession Planning Workshops scheduled on June 18 and July 23, NWIRC will host a session about Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOP), along with a Succession Planning Panel Discussion. The program will be held on July 31 from 1:00-4:30pm at FICDA in Franklin, PA. Regional manufacturers will share their own stories of succession planning and offer insights to companies that are just getting started or need to move their plan forward.
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 (SBA):

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UPCOMING EVENTS

ISO 9001:2015 Internal Auditor Workshop
June 18-20
Location: St Marys
The 3-day course provides a detailed review of the ISO 9001:2015 quality standard. Participants will learn how to conduct an audit, write the audit report, take corrective actions and more.

Succession Planning Workshop
June 18; July 23
Location: Franklin; DuBois
A program for anyone ready to begin working on key areas of an initial transition and succession plan. At the end of this session, you will have a draft plan to discuss with the rest of their family, management team, or professional advisors; and practical tips for continuing to develop, finalize, and implement your plan.

Machine Vision
June 19
Location: St Marys
Learn how to reduce costs and improve the efficiency of your production line during this hands-on workshop. You will discover the fundamentals of machine vision and see the latest technology solutions from Cognex. And, participants will be entered in a drawing for a chance to win an iRobot Roomba Vacuum Cleaner.

Lean Basics with Simulation
June 25
Location: St Marys
The class combines lecture and simulation to provide a firm foundation of lean manufacturing techniques. Plant Layout, One-Piece Flow, TPM, Cellular Production, TAKT Time, Pull and Kanbans, and Quick Changeover...to name just a few. Each concept will build upon your ability to eliminate manufacturing waste.

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