Strengthening the Links in Your Supply Chain

by Bob Zaruta, President/CEO, NWIRC

For on-time delivery to customers, manufacturers usually depend on on-time delivery from their suppliers. Quality products rely on quality materials or parts from suppliers. Being price competitive is based somewhat on prices companies pay their suppliers. Manufacturers know the importance of their supply chain to business, and as the idiom goes, ‘the chain is only as strong as its weakest link’.

MEP Centers, like NWIRC, have been helping manufacturers for over thirty years with their critical business issues, including challenges with their supply chain. Carroll Thomas, Director of NIST MEP, wrote a previous article on the Manufacturing Innovation Blog, titled, Supply Chain Foundations, that focuses on the interdependency and strength of the supply chain. Here are some poignant excerpts that capture some of her thoughts:

“U.S. manufacturing’s competitiveness depends on the performance of companies operating at all levels of the supply chain. However, supply chain competitiveness depends not just on the performance of each individual member, but also on how the elements of the supply chain work together and on their responsiveness to market demand.”

“Any manufacturing company’s growth is intrinsically linked to the performance of its supply chain. Companies cannot compete without other lean, flexible and innovative companies supplying necessary parts and components.”

“Managing supply chains requires integrating all the links in the chain into a seamless network. Orchestrating the flow of information and products—whether it is about new product needs, quality issues, costs, delivery, inventory, or something else—requires a deft touch, but also the ability to peer into the supply chain to make sure all the parts are working together smoothly.”

How often do you examine the relationships you have with your suppliers? Are the ‘links’ strong and working together? Have you shared specific expectations? NWIRC coordinated a recent project with a manufacturing company in North Central, PA to do just that. The company’s ultimate goal was to better meet customer demand, drive down variable costs, increase productivity, and improve competitiveness. To do this, they wanted their regional supply chain partners to better understand their individual role in the company’s business and seek ways to improve operations that would be mutually beneficial. Working with a lean expert, a supplier engagement event was coordinated in order to collaborate and set expectations for their key suppliers. In addition, site visits were conducted to each of these key suppliers to establish demand expectations, discuss solutions for reducing lead times, and improving overall communication. The outcome was an ‘orchestrated’ collaboration of all their suppliers working towards a common goal.

Have you examined the geography of your supply chain? ‘Made in America’ is a mantra we have all heard and appreciate.

Companies that are able to manufacture their products in the U.S, and source required parts and materials here too, are proud to use this phrase.

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Start with Lean Together™

Companies are seeing impact from their participation with NWIRC’s Lean Together programs. New cohorts for Lean Together 1.0 are starting in August throughout the region, and Lean Together 2.0 and Advanced are now underway among companies who have previous success from their 2nd lean initiatives.

Last year’s Lean Together 1.0 kick-off at SEPCO.

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Companies often look overseas for sourcing the materials they need in order to reduce costs and offer a competitively-priced product, but there have been successful reshoring initiatives over the years that have increased domestic manufacturing and domestic sourcing. Nationally, OEMs are looking for more ‘American-made’ parts opening up opportunities to domestic small and medium-sized companies. There can also be benefits to sourcing at a regional-level. Not only does this activity help holistically strengthen the manufacturing industry for the entire region, but can have a positive impact to your business with potential reduction of lead-times and shipping costs. The Next Gen Manufacturing Partnership for northwestern Pennsylvania is in the early stages of working on a platform for companies to share capabilities and needs with the goal of increasing regional sourcing.

If you haven’t done it in a while, take the time to examine all the links in your supply chain to evaluate where you can gain more efficiencies. And, check out NWIRC’s events schedule for supply chain optimization programs scheduled this Fall.

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1. Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) of the U.S. Department of Commerce is a nationwide network of centers focused on helping U.S. manufacturers strengthen their supply chain integration and access new technology helping them to become more competitive.

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**ERMP’s WorkAdvance: Building a Pipeline**

The Erie Regional Manufacturer Partnership (ERMP) is addressing an issue facing many local companies in Erie (and the region)...the ability to find talent, especially for entry-level positions. The WorkAdvance Program seeks to address this gap by coupling short-term foundational workplace and technical skills training with employment, career coaching, and on-the-job training. Modern Industries, PHB Corporation, ISM, Machining Concepts, and Erie Press Systems are hiring companies participating in ERMP’s WorkAdvance program, but you don’t have to be an ERMP member to participate.

The goal of WorkAdvance is to recruit and enroll three cohorts of participants for potential hiring by participating companies. The program will ease the hiring process for manufacturers, providing a stronger pipeline of workers. The training will front-load the fundamentals, including Workplace Skills, Safety, and Shop Math for two weeks (no cost to participant or employer). From there, technical classes will be structured to enable participants to work in paid internships while continuing to attend training.

WorkAdvance is a valuable program for manufacturing companies and also a great opportunity for those interested in starting a career in manufacturing. Whether a recent high-school graduate or someone working in another industry with few opportunities for advancement, the program is structured to support the success of the selected candidates.

**Employers’ Timeline for Participation and Candidate Selection:**

- Confirm desire to participate by contacting ERMP Project Manager
- Deadline for the 1st Cohort is Monday, July 29th (Also taking commitments now for the future cohorts)
- If confirming for 1st Cohort, participate in Recruitment Fair on Thursday, August 1st at 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
- ERMP Project Team will prescreen candidates following the recruitment fair
- Employers will interview and select pool of candidates to be placed in the program

**Candidates’ Technical Training and Internship Timeline:**

- GECAC Career Readiness Training – 2 weeks / 60 hours of training, paid at $11.00/hour (paid by the program)
- Northern Pennsylvania Regional College Technical Training – 3 weeks / 100 hours of training, paid at $11.00 /hr (paid by the employer)
- Internship with participating employers – 3 weeks / 120 hours of training, paid at $11.00 / hr (paid by the employer)
- Full-time Employment – New hire pay increased to $13.00 – $17.00 /hr (paid by the employer)

Contact Megan Wagner Ingram via email at mingram@tpma-inc.com to participate or for more information.

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**Start with Lean Together (Continued from page 1)**

Lean Together 1.0 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
Franklin Industries embraced the 2 second lean mind-set from the beginning. One of the process changes involved educating vendors about their requirements for receiving raw materials. This reduced the time spent on materials handling, including receiving and organizing.

Contact Molly Reichard for more info about getting started with Lean Together™ 1.0 at (814) 217-6067.

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**What’s So Cool about Manufacturing?**

NWIRC, along with numerous community partners, are gearing up for the 2019/2020 school year and the coolest student video contest. What’s So Cool About Manufacturing pairs a team of 7th/8th grade students, and their teacher coach, with a manufacturing company to create a video to share with the community. The goal is to change perceptions about manufacturing and showcase cool career opportunities in our own backyard. Last year there were 15 contests across the Commonwealth with 252 participating schools paired with 252 companies. You can check out all the videos at wwwWhatsSoCool.org. NWIRC is now recruiting companies to pair with middle schools, as well as other sponsors. Featured manufacturers are needed in Erie, Crawford, Mercer, Lawrence, Clarion, Forest, Venango, and Warren Counties. If you have an interest in participating or learning more, please contact Laurie Knoll at lknoll@nwirc.org or (814) 217-6066.

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**Your Big Idea Could Be Worth Big Bucks!**

You don’t need to be an inventor, scientist, or historic statesmen like Ben Franklin in order to win this year’s BIG IDEA contest. Ben Franklin Technology Partners is looking for tech entrepreneurs, developers, or small manufacturers who are creating innovative new products, processes, or software applications. There’s up to $50,000 on the line and they are making it easy to qualify and apply. In order to qualify, you or your business must be located in Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Elk, Jefferson, McKean, or Potter Counties.

In addition to the money, the winner will receive:
- Access to seminars offered by Ben Franklin’s eMarketing Learning Center and the Clarion Small Business Development Center
- A free consult on applying for federal R&D grant money from the Innovation Partnership
- Executive business and technology growth services assistance offered by the Northwest Industrial Resource Center

Visit www.BigIdea.BenFranklin.org for the details and entry form. For questions about the contest or application process, phone John Siggins at 814-865-2879 or email Jill Edwards at jilledwards@psu.edu

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**WEDnet Support for Training**

WEDnet (Workforce & Economic Development Network of Pennsylvania) supports Pennsylvania companies by investing in the training needed to upgrade the skills, knowledge and effectiveness of current employees. Companies that qualify for WEDnet funding can receive up to $600 per employee for Essential Skills Training and up to $1200 per employee for Technology Training. Companies can see if they qualify and find their local contact at www.wednetpa.com.

If you are building your WEDnet training plan, NWIRC offers numerous courses that qualify for reimbursement. Our schedule is ever-evolving with even more topics and classes soon being added for Fall and Winter. Courses can be customized or added based on our regional manufacturers’ requests. Contact our Event Coordinator, Molly Reichard to discuss your specific employee training needs.
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):

Tom Weible  
814.590.5202  
Cameron, Clearfield, Elk, Jefferson, McKean & Potter Counties

Susan Hileman  
814.572.2077  
Forest, Mercer, Venango, Clarion Counties & Titusville

Lisa Pustelak  
814.683.1034  
Crawford, Warren Counties, Corry & Edinboro

Andrew Idzik  
814.217.6068  
Erie County & Bradford

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NORTHWEST OFFICE  
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8425 PEACH STREET  
ERIE, PA 16509

UPCOMING EVENTS

Introduction to Improvement Kata  
August 13  
Location: DuBois

An opportunity for manufacturers in the region to learn and experience kata first-hand. During this NO COST 2-hour workshop, you’ll learn how kata is used in teams for continuous improvement.

ISO 9001:2015  
Internal Auditor  
August 20-22  
Location: Erie

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.

Statistical Process Control (SPC)  
August 28  
Location: Grove City

SPC is another tool for your quality management system. This hands-on class teaches integrated SPC charts, how to select and use the proper control chart, and establish control limits. Exercises will demonstrate data gathering, constructing the control chart, and continuous monitoring.

IATF 16949:2016  
Internal Auditor  
Sept 17-19  
Location: Erie

Training of the IATF 16949 automotive standard will provide understanding of quality management principles in context with ISO 9001:2015, along with techniques of process-based auditing with hands-on activities.

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