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Aztec Company Puts Lean Production Philosophy to Work

By Denise Williams, Innovation Director, New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership



About 18 months ago, Aztec Machine and Repair of Bloomfield sent its management and supervisory personnel, as well as its production floor workers, to a class in the fundamentals of lean manufacturing given by the New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership, or MEP – a nonprofit agency that helps small and mid-sized U.S. businesses create and preserve jobs by implementing money- and time-saving production and administration measures.

Aztec – which provides machining and fabrication services for the many oil, gas and mining industries in the Four Corners area – had two goals for the training: to increase the lean manufacturing literacy of its work force and to generate momentum toward its next goal of becoming ISO registered.

ISO registration is proof that a company complies with global quality management standards in producing its product or service. Because many major purchasers and companies require their suppliers to have this registration, training coordinator Manuel Figueroa and company owner Tim Montoya felt it would show Aztec's clients that the company performed consistent and reliable work and allow the company to expand its outreach.

Raising Awareness

The MEP class helped all two dozen Aztec employees break down the steps involved in their work, Figueroa said. "The most significant change was an awareness of the need to define the processes – how we do what we do."

Aztec Machine is a custom job shop that specializes in hydraulic and industrial repair, but it also fabricates machined products and tools used in the industries it serves.

"Elements of lean manufacturing don't necessarily coincide 100 percent to a job shop," Figueroa said, but training the company's workers in the basic elements and concepts of lean manufacturing showed them how to work better, faster and easier to help the company become more competitive.

While some variation is unavoidable when building a product or providing a service, lean

manufacturing strives to minimize variations and eliminate obstructions that add expenses. Activities that don't add value are inefficiencies that customers don't want to pay for, so they need to be minimized.

After helping Aztec train its work force, MEP provided further assistance toward the company's ISO registration efforts.

The class "spurred a lot of discussion and ideas," Figueroa said. "Both [the MEP class and ISO registration process] emphasize the active participation of all employees in the focus on customer satisfaction."

On- and Off-Site Training

New Mexico MEP is part of a nationwide network that exists to help businesses innovate and streamline production and administration. Businesses can send employees to MEP's training sessions or receive on-site help applying quality management and lean management principles in offices and factories. All New Mexico businesses can take advantage of MEP training, and financial assistance is available to qualifying businesses that need it.

MEP serves businesses from its offices in Albuquerque, Roswell and Farmington by deploying consultants known as innovation directors to all parts of the state. It is supported by federal, state and private funds, and works in collaboration with the New Mexico Economic Development Department to help businesses prepare for ISO registration.

For more information about New Mexico MEP or to find upcoming training sessions, visit newmexicomep.org or call (505) 262-0921.

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