



Marlin Steel Wire Products
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Quality Conversation with Drew Greenblatt

Marlin Steel Wire Products LLC, a Baltimore manufacturer of engineered wire products, caters to an international clientele. In 2000, faced with low-cost imports of bagel baskets, the original foundation of Marlin's revenue, the company's owner, Drew Greenblatt, decided to concentrate on manufacturing specialized products for customers such as Toyota Motor Co., Ford Motor Co., Pfizer Inc., Illinois Tool Works Inc., and Westinghouse Electric Co. Ltd. By implementing lean practices, Marlin grew from near-extinction to become a profitable, award-winning manufacturer. Here, Greenblatt discusses some of the practices that helped achieve that growth.

Quality Digest: What convinced you that lean was the best path for your company?

Drew Greenblatt: Shipping fast, reducing scrap and rework, and improving quality convinced us that lean was the path to success. Prior to lean, our robots would crank out parts as fast as possible. Occasionally, the robots would be set up incorrectly and quickly generate scrap. The lean approach resulted in quality errors of one bad part, not thousands.

QD: How often do you have a quality assurance inspector confirm product quality, and what do you do when a defect in production is discovered?

DG : Currently, each employee fabricates a single operation. If a part doesn't fit into its fixture, the employee stops production until the problem is solved. In addition, foremen check the quality of the work.

***QD** : Is close cooperation with your customers something you developed as part of your personal management style?*

DG : We impress on our team that honesty and candor are paramount for building trust and generating reorders.

***QD** : What systems do you use for designing products, and how have they aided the implementation of lean?*

DG : We use AutoCad Inventor. The software allows us to quickly generate fixturing that constrains our parts, forcing consistency and minimizing defects.

Our engineers each have two large flat- screen monitors, one for e-mail and the other for AutoCad data. Not having to minimize screens or close programs to send/receive e-mails supercharges our engineers.

***QD**: Does Marlin's staff meet to discuss how processes can be improved? If so, what is the most useful improvement that has come from employee input?*

DG : The best ideas for improving quality come from the employees on the factory floor. We now have "pre-release" meetings where the plant manager discusses each of the jobs with the lead people to optimize production flow and identify pitfalls.