



<http://www.sme.org/cgi-bin/get-press.pl?&&20071262&SI&&SME&>

Lean success is "wired" and "focused like a laser beam"

When it comes to lean, Drew Greenblatt is totally “wired.” As owner of Baltimore-based Marlin Steel Wire Products, a leading maker of wire parts baskets and parts-washing racks for companies such as Boeing, Dolby Laboratories, Honeywell and Toyota, Greenblatt says his company began its lean journey 1999 when it began building its 16,000-square-foot manufacturing facility with the help of lean manufacturing expert Paul Engle of Grant Thornton for plant layout and parts flow.

But it wasn’t until four or five years ago, when the company was operating in the red and contending with quality problems and tough price competition from China, that Marlin “focused itself like a laser beam” on growth-driven application of lean principles. Once that revelation took hold, the company transformed itself from a maker of commodity products into a producer of high-quality, solution-oriented, custom baskets. Today, Marlin is known as much for its quality products as it is for its rapid time-to-market capabilities.

Success factors

Marlin sales during the 1999-2007 timeframe soared from \$800,000 to \$3.5 million, with Greenblatt giving much of the credit to the lean transformation. Of special note is the fact that Marlin is producing and selling more with the exact same number of staff as it had in 1999: 20 full-time and eight part-time employees.

So what exactly is the lean secret to Marlin’s speedy success story?

“We were trying to practice lean four or five years ago, but we were losing a lot of money,” recalls Greenblatt. “We were doing large batches—a thousand top and side frames at a time. We were buying a tremendous volume of raw materials and much of our money was tied up in inventory.”

Two books, “The Goal: A Process of Ongoing Improvement,” by Eliyahu M. Goldratt and Jeff Cox, and “The Toyota Way,” by Jeffrey K. Liker, led Greenblatt and his

management team (Simon Matthews, Robert Cooper and Nathan Myers) to “manufacture” an about-face.

“Today we’re buying smaller batches of materials and we’re converting them into product faster,” explains Greenblatt. “We’re truly practicing what lean says to do; that is, do one unit at a time as it flows through the process. Initially, it was difficult to make the conversion, but by doing so our inventory turns have skyrocketed.

“Further,” continues Greenblatt, “we have bought back a lot of real estate in terms of previously wasted floor space, and our cash flow is greatly improved because it is no longer tied up in raw materials that can be damaged by a forklift or whatever while waiting to be used.”

Greenblatt says a dedicated conversion to one-piece flow is complex, but the complexity involved is more than offset by the benefits. “Management really has to buy into it and impose it throughout the company culture. We did, and today we’re making exactly what our customers want and delivering product when they want it.”



Drew Greenblatt, president of Marlin Steel Wire Products, is committed to lean and the production of custom wire baskets for manufacturing.



Shown is the heavily fixtured robotic welding of a basket for Toyota. A finished cleaning basket used by Boeing to wash parts.

About the author

Joe Jancsurak is editor of *Lean Directions* and [Six Sigma Quality in Manufacturing](#) e-newsletters.

[News Archives](#)

