

The Donnelly difference:

“world-class” workforce training contributes to manufacturer’s competitive edge

Each workday morning key employees from various functional areas at Donnelly Custom Manufacturing in Alexandria gather together in the company’s “war room” to review and report on results, and to strategize. No, they’re not out to plot world domination (except perhaps in short-run plastics injection molding). “It’s a war on waste,” explained Sam Wagner, Donnelly’s director of advanced manufacturing.

Those gathered—from sales to production to customer service to shipping—look at the last 24 hours to identify problems, then look ahead at the next 24 hours to figure out how to resolve them to improve and meet goals.

Donnelly has operated the war room since 1997. “Before the war room, Donnelly didn’t have a good way of identifying and monitoring problem areas,” Wagner said. The idea came from training provided through Enterprise Minnesota and West Central Initiative’s Workforce 2020 Training Program.

“Donnelly difference” continued inside



Donnelly’s training advocates: from left: Sam Wagner, director of advanced manufacturing, and Brad Andrist, training and continuous improvement coordinator.



FOCUS ON THE REGION QUARTERLY REPORT | DECEMBER 2011

“Donnelly Difference” continued

How Workforce 2020 works

Workforce 2020 helps manufacturers with the cost of industry-specific retraining of existing workers. WCI works with Enterprise Minnesota, who provides one-on-one assistance to help businesses identify specific new technologies and methodologies that may improve their productivity and profitability. When a business decides to implement a new technology, Enterprise Minnesota also helps the business identify specific worker training needs and qualified trainers, and writes an application to Workforce 2020. If WCI approves a Workforce 2020 grant, Enterprise Minnesota administers the funds. When the project is concluded, Enterprise Minnesota works with the business to prepare a brief final report, describing the accomplishments of the project.

Donnelly is a huge proponent of Workforce 2020.

“Before Workforce 2020, we might have identified a training need and looked to see whatever local resource was available. We used whatever we could find,” Wagner said. Donnelly found that the available training was not always a good fit, nor always adequate to meet their needs. The advent of the Workforce 2020 program to bring in unique manufacturing training not found in the region changed all that.

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Sam Wagner

“Now, if we identify a training need we’re confident we can get the exact training we need through Enterprise Minnesota and Workforce 2020,” Wagner said.

“Training certainly helped our operations, but more than that, it helped change our mindset,” he continued. “When you realize you’re getting world-class training, you realize that you are working for a world-class organization.”

Donnelly was at the forefront of receiving Training Within Industry (TWI) instruction.

“Enterprise Minnesota brought in the master trainer for TWI—there was only one in the country then, and one master trainer-in-training. We received training from the top person, Patrick Graupp, and the second master trainer was certified while training us.” You can even read about Donnelly’s TWI training in the book, *Implementing TWI – Creating and Managing a Skills-based Culture*, by Patrick Graupp and Robert Wrona.

Donnelly employees have expressed appreciation for the quality training. “The feedback is phenomenal.

On a scale from one to ten, on every individual review we always receive eights, nines and tens,” Wagner said. That’s big, he continued, because Donnelly employees “tell it like it is.”

Donnelly is often part of multiple-company trainings. “That’s a big part of Workforce 2020,” Wagner said. “WCI encourages that. They’re looking out for the whole region and how to make it better. There’s cost incentive to do that.”

	1987	2009	% of start	% change adjusted for inflation
EDR4 Average Weekly Manufacturing Wage¹	\$377.00	\$761.00	201.86%	13.01%
National Average Weekly Manufacturing Wage	\$399.59	\$726.12	181.72%	-7.13%
Employment	1987	2009	% of start	% change
EDR4 Manufacturing Employees²	4,793	9,786	204.17%	104.17%
National Manufacturing Employees (thousands)	17,635	11,857	67.24%	-32.76%

EDR4 is Economic Development Region 4, covering nine counties in west central Minnesota.

¹ Weekly wage average statistics from DEED labor market analyst: [ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/suppl/empisit.ceseeb2.txt](http://ftp.bls.gov/pub/suppl/empisit.ceseeb2.txt) and www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm

² Employment numbers from DEED labor market analyst: www.bea.gov/industry/iedguide.htm#gdpia_ad_df

At first companies were leery of training together, but soon found the multiple-company training enhanced the experience as they learned from each other’s perspectives. “The initial hesitancy was washed away,” Wagner said.

Now, the companies collaborate on other things, like working to ensure an adequate workforce. They’ve also formed a safety council, and come together as members of the Tri-State Manufacturing Association and on peer councils facilitated by Enterprise Minnesota.

Progressing, not regressing

Why should other manufacturers who may balk at spending the time and money consider workforce training?

“You are either going to spend it now, or spend a lot more on down time and ineffectiveness,” said Brad Andrist, Donnelly’s training and continuous improvement coordinator. “You’ll spend it one way or another. You might as well spend it on something that’s going to increase productivity and improve your capabilities and the bottom line.”

“At Donnelly, we like to say, ‘Nothing is static, you’re either progressing or regressing’,”

Wagner said. He points to the Department of Employment and Economic Development labor statistics that show west central Minnesota increasingly improving in manufacturing wages and job numbers (see chart above). “Look at the region, there’s a huge gap between how people in manufacturing are doing in this region compared to the nation. I think training is why. We’re increasingly capable and confident.”

Manufacturers, learn more about Workforce 2020

Will Workforce 2020 work for your company? Find out more at www.wcif.org/page/workforce

Many training opportunities in West Central Minnesota

Check out bizlinks.wcif.org for a list of some of the training opportunities available to area businesses.