

## Forging a Lean supply chain

**L**ean supply chains don't just happen. They emerge from strong working relationships between supply chain partners who are thoroughly committed to continuous improvement.

That's the type of relationship that Donnelly Custom Manufacturing Company has with one of its largest customers—Marvin Windows and Doors.

A cornerstone of this relationship is a Lean technique known as Training within Industry (TWI). This technique helped Donnelly, an Alexandria, Minn.-based maker of custom injection molded parts, greatly improve production efficiency. It also played a part in Donnelly receiving the Marvin Windows and Doors Silver Supplier Award for 2007.

Donnelly adopted the TWI approach in 2005, and started sharing it with Marvin a year later. "Sharing our knowledge and best practices such as TWI is one way that we form high-performance partnerships, rather than merely effective supplier relationships, with our customers," says Donnelly President **Ron Kirscht**.

The TWI approach offers proven tools for embedding the principles of continuous improvement into a corporate culture.

There are three basic elements to TWI.

- Job relations: how to gain cooperation of others to get things done;
- Job methods: how to improve an existing method or process; and
- Job instructions: how to train someone effectively.

A TWI initiative can be launched by training employees on any of these elements. Donnelly started with Job Relations.

"We had been doing Lean for a couple of years and we wanted to develop leadership skills and the ability to work in teams," says Sam Wagner, Donnelly's director of advanced manufacturing.

Donnelly got its initial TWI education through Minnesota Technology Inc., a not-for-profit organization that offers business consulting to Minnesota-based companies. "We sent several people to the training and some of them

became certified trainers," Wagner says.

Donnelly ultimately designated three individuals to coordinate ongoing training in each TWI element. "To date, we have trained about one-third of [the company's 230 employees]," says Wagner, who is the lead Job Methods trainer.

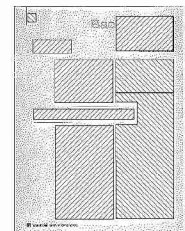
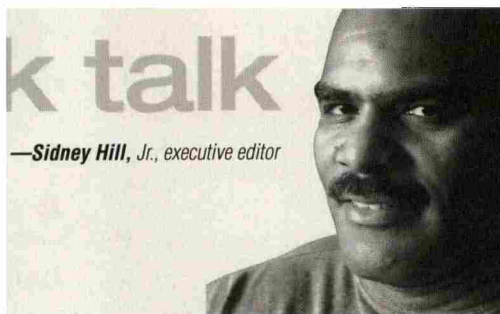
"When we started with Job Relations, people saw it as an effective way of dealing with existing personnel issues, and preventing future problems," he adds.

Marvin Windows and Doors, based in Warroad, Minn., had started its own TWI program, but had trouble locating a Job Methods trainer. It approached Minnesota Technology about upcoming classes in that element, and the organization put out a call to area companies that might be offering it at their facilities.

"We responded immediately because they were our customer," Wagner recalls.

Two Marvin employees went to Donnelly's plant for five two-hour training sessions, and a tighter customer-supplier bond was formed. The training centered on ways of improving some of Donnelly's processes.

"It made no difference that they were from a different company," Wagner says. "TWI methods are applicable to any type of manufacturing. It was nice to have customers give us a fresh perspective. They came up with some good improvements for us. It's difficult to think about showing customers how to spot waste in your processes, but in the end, we built a certain level of trust by doing that."



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