

Process Improvement teams help RobbJack meet demand



In the enviable position of experiencing an increased demand for specialized cutting tools, RobbJack (www.robbjack.com) of Lincoln is relying on employee innovation to increase capacity. Teams are looking at the 40-year-old precision cutting tool company's processes and suggesting ways to improve productivity and quality as well as reduce waste. Jes Vargas, Sierra College Center for Applied Competitive Technologies (CACT – www.sierracollegetraining.com) consultant, is training RobbJack staff to identify problems, look at processes and seek

solutions. According to Dave Baker, president, the company is seeing results by getting employees involved.

"It started on the shop floor where we cut machine change-over time from 90 to 30 minutes, saving 18 hours per day," explained Baker. "Then process improvement spread to other departments; there are six teams working on issues right now. Through the CACT training, we learned more effective ways to track occurrences that waste resources and then pinpoint the problem."



Baker explained that the team collects data, writes a problem statement and sets measurable improvement goals. *"When teams visually map out every step in the process, and measure the time required for each step, inefficiencies become apparent,"* said Baker. *"Then it is easy to question the current steps and make changes that often yield immediate results."*



The company posts progress boards throughout the building tabulating teams' on-going success. *"Boards are visually inspected monthly and employees earn quarterly monetary incentives for making progress,"* said Baker.

Process improvement is being applied in the office as well as on the manufacturing floor at RobbJack. For instance, sales orders were previously printed and passed along to other departments, where more information was printed until a packet of paper was associated with the order. Then the information was scanned and the paper shredded. By going to electronic sales order tracking, Baker says that 60% of the printing has been eliminated.

Shipping is another area that is benefiting from process improvement. Staff discovered that tasks done by other departments can impact shipping's ability to meet schedules. *"Completed tools are cleaned by one department before they are sent to shipping,"* said Baker. *"By moving the cleaning function to shipping, it is easier to meet deadlines. Any process that requires the interaction of multiple departments may be improved by streamlining."*

"We are making significant changes to our business as a direct result of the Sierra College CACT process improvement training," said Baker. *"Not only does Jes Vargas guide us through examining the way we work but he has a ton of tools, charts and methods to keep us on track."*



For more information, go to the Sierra College CACT Training & Development web site, www.sierracollegetraining.com, call (916) 660-7517 or email training@sierracollege.edu.