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## Changeover Collaboration Frees Up Big Time For Geiger

**Geiger** is one of the nation's largest promotional products distributors. It is also a manufacturer of quality planners, organizers, and stationary products. Founded in 1878, this 5th generation family business is based in Lewiston, ME and includes, among its businesses, the 194 year old Farmers' Almanac™. 400 team members in Maine and around the country support a like number of independent sales counselors and a customer base that exceeds 50,000.

In mid-2010 Geiger began to work with Pat Wardwell, COO of GBMP, to learn and apply Lean principles across all divisions. The primary focus at the start has been to transform the SunGraphix division's value stream to improve productivity and reduce lead-times.

SunGraphix products include a wide variety of pocket and desk planners, wall and desk calendars, notepads, journals, and other stationary products most of which are customized in a variety of ways for each customer.

After introductory lean training, SunGraphix employees learned how to map their value stream, finding many opportunities to improve material and information flow. Today, they are in the midst of a total reorganization of plant layout and product flows as they shift from push to pull production.

The manufacturing process is reliant on a wide variety of machines to print and bind book-style products. Because changeover times on this equipment range from a few minutes to a few hours, production has been biased to large lot sizes and WIP stagnation.

Recently 3 employee teams conducted a 2-day kaizen event focused on reducing changeover time on three different pieces of equipment – a large printing press, an automatic paper-punching machine, and a small manual paper-puncher. Two guests from the Gem Group, another GBMP client and a preferred supplier to Geiger, joined the Geiger employees during the event. Gem is further along on its Lean journey. The Gem Group was anxious to share their Lean knowledge, and welcomed the idea of providing an outside learning opportunity for some of their employees. It was a “win” for both companies.

After a brief classroom introduction to the changeover reduction method, trainer/coach Pat Wardwell challenged the teams to each cut changeover time by at least 50%. The 3 teams first reviewed films of the current changeover process for each piece of equipment and then began to brainstorm ways to improve them.

They quickly applied their ideas, refined them, and developed new standard procedures to document and capture the improved methods. Then, they re-filmed the changeovers using their new methods. At the end of the second day the teams reported out their results to the Geiger Lean Steering Team.

Results were as follows:

Machine	Time Before	Time After	% Improvement
Manual Punch Press	11:51 min	2:27 min	79%
Automatic Punch Press	27:00 min	4:51 min	82%
Large Printing Press	220 min	125 min	43%

Even more important than the significant documented results was the change in thinking that took place with many of the participants. “When you bring together many sets of eyes, both experienced and inexperienced, to study a changeover and ask them to consider what aspects of the process the customer values, they quickly begin to question the status quo,” said Pat Wardwell, COO, GBMP. “The teams were quick to recognize the wastes of walking and searching, as well as the stress and strain placed on operators when it is hard to get the machines running correctly quickly.”

Gene Geiger, CEO of Geiger, was dazzled by what the teams had accomplished in a short period of time. “In this very brief exercise our teams were able to capture almost 2,000 hours of yearly savings. More importantly, everyone’s eyes were opened. We had no idea of the waste we have tolerated for years or the opportunities all around us to improve.”

“There is nothing more exciting and heartwarming than to see the power of people unleashed when they are given the training, tools, and encouragement. And the pride and self-confidence they now have to take on more is simply awesome. Virtually every person can see where we need to go and the how they and the company will benefit as we move along the Lean line.”

“Lean promises to be the single most transformational activity we have seen for our manufacturing process in my working lifetime. Without question, we could not have gotten to this point without GBMP’s help. This is going to be a very exciting ride.”

Here are links for more information.

**Geiger and SunGraphix.** [www.geiger.com](http://www.geiger.com) and [www.sungraphix.com](http://www.sungraphix.com).

**Gem Group.** [www.gemline.com](http://www.gemline.com)

**GBMP.** [www.gbmp.org](http://www.gbmp.org)