



Alene Candle: Turning Up the Heat on Lean

June 1, 2011

Alene Candle LLC, located in Milford, New Hampshire is a full-service contract candle manufacturer. In business since 1995, the company now manufactures more than 17 million candles annually, bringing an artisan's touch to private label candle brands for the gift, cosmetic, and retail markets. Alene's team of over 130 people develops, designs, produces and tests its candles to exacting specifications.

In order to continue this trend, Alene Candle's President, Rodney Harl, asked GBMP to help the company determine how to achieve greater levels of productivity and improve key operational metrics. As a highly seasonal business, Mr. Harl was especially interested in introducing simple, standardized methods so that the company could reduce waste and more easily re-balance staffing when volume increases dramatically to support the high season.

Enter GBMP Continuous Improvement Manager/Master Black Belt, Ron Pujalte. Through a customized program of training and targeted Kaizen Events, Ron has helped Alene tap into the knowledge and creativity of Alene employees and the results are really starting to show.

For example, as part of a Value Stream Mapping event in January 2011, the team completed a spaghetti diagram for part of the production process, and then put in place a new process that **cut walking from 8.35 miles per operator per shift to .45 miles per operator per shift!** In a February 2011 Kaizen event focused on small-component management, a cross functional team focused on simple workplace organization in specific inventory and on-floor storage, and also put kanbans in place for some of the commonly used materials at the end of the production line. They also made improvements to the information flow, **saving 162 miles of walking per year!**

In March Alene focused on their packing process, collecting cycle times on all the process steps, analyzing the data, then developing and testing new standards for each line position. The team then **created visual work and cleaning instructions** for all positions and established a standard card to use in documenting the instructions. This method is especially helpful at Alene, a plant where many different languages are spoken by employees and where use of temporary labor is critical in the high season. The Kaizen Team also set up visual communication devices (andons) so line employees can easily signal the Line Leader, QA, Maintenance or a Group Leader when there is a problem.

In April a team worked on a finished goods inventory management process and identified ways to **eliminate 84 weeks of non-valued activities through the use of mistake proofing techniques (Poka-Yoke).**

In the most recent Kaizen event, an Alene team attacked three warehouses and established better linkage between the pack out process and the warehouses. Over 5 days the team **freed up over 120 pallet locations and implemented a pull system (which resulted in hundreds of miles saved in transit) between warehouse operations and the pack out process.**

GBMP CI Manager Ron is confident the changes made so far will continue to grow and have a positive impact, especially during the heavy summer/fall production period. **“The people at Alene have great ideas and are moving pretty quickly to get them implemented. They are getting good support from the Lean Steering Team we established, and I am continuing to challenge them to complete improvement projects before the busy season comes.”**

Alene President Rodney Harl is also very pleased with the efforts his team has made and is looking forward to seeing what else his creative employees can do. **“I have made it a point to walk around to see and talk with folks about the improvements they have made, and they are so effective, yet often elegantly simple. Small changes for the better every week are what we are getting and Ron has been great at helping us learn how to engage people and target key areas that can make or break us when we are really busy. When you are undergoing growth, you have to be mindful of NOT growing your costs in line with your revenue, and continuous improvement is helping all Alene employees see how to do this.”**

For more information about Alene Candle please visit www.alene.com

For more information about GBMP please visit www.gbmp.org.



UMass Boston
100 Morrissey Blvd
Boston MA 02125
617-287-7648