



Employees Achieve 88% Reduction in Set-up Times at Checon Corporation

In 2007 Checon Corporation of North Attleboro, Massachusetts was awarded a \$109,000 state workforce grant to train its 108 employees in "lean manufacturing". Checon is a private company that is a leader in electrical contacts and contact materials technology. Manufacturers of wiring devices, general purpose switches, and most appliance and industrial controls depend on Checon contacts for their products' performance.

The training grant funds were sought to help the company focus on reducing waste and inefficiency in their processes. At the time the grant was received Allen Conaway, President of Checon Corporation, spoke about the needs of the company. " *As a small business, we have to do everything faster, better and more efficiently than our competitors,*" Conaway said.

During the two year span of the training grant, Ron Pujalte, Continuous Improvement Manager from the not-for-profit Greater Boston Manufacturing Partnership (GBMP) provided the lean training at Checon and served as their lean coach/guide during on-site improvement efforts. Employees were training in the basics of lean manufacturing as well as other continuous improvement tools such set-up reduction. The company has worked hard to change their management system in order to allow employees to use their creativity to positively impact bottom line results. For example, set-up/changeover time is a critical measure for Checon. Employee teams have succeeded in taking set-ups from 6 hours to 45 minutes using lean methods and by leveraging their knowledge and experience to identify and implement many ideas for improvement. And they realize there are still many more opportunities to drive set-up times even lower as they continue to focus on waste reduction.

Like many companies, Checon has seen a significant drop in business as a result of the recent economic downturn. Despite business being off, the company is using this time to cross-train employees in other jobs, so workers become more flexible and gain new skills. The organization knows that their multi-skilled, engaged workforce will make them even more competitive in the long run.

Recently Checon completed their workforce training grant program, and Peter Blackler, V.P. Operations at Checon, was asked to comment on the company's experience with lean and GBMP: *"It was obvious from the outset that Ron and GBMP had Checon's best interests and success as a primary objective. Ron has an exceptional ability to take new, non-traditional concepts and present them in a simple, straight forward manner. I rate the training and consulting support provided by GBMP as 'Excellent'. They are a very focused, knowledgeable and talented organization, and I expect to continue to be in touch with them as we proceed on our continuous improvement journey"*

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