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GBMP Introduces Yokoten, then Training to Help Unleash Stream of Improvement Ideas at Groov-Pin

A GBMP Client Case Study

Groov-Pin Corporation headquartered in Smithfield, Rhode Island has been a leader in engineered fasteners and components for connection and control for over 80 years. Founded in 1926 to develop the potential for a patented press fit fastener called a grooved pin, Groov-Pin's current products find applications in a wide range of inventories from automotive to aerospace, electronics to energy, and defense to dental. The company has manufacturing sites in Rhode Island and Georgia.

Employees at the Groov-Pin site in Smithfield got to experience the power of **Yokoten**, or the process for sharing learning laterally across an organization, a few months ago with the help of GBMP. Yokoten, a Japanese word, sets the expectation that people go and see different areas or sites to learn how others have applied continuous improvement concepts or methods. The idea is then to improve on those methods when subsequently applying them within the visiting organization's own processes.

Groov-Pin had been on the lean journey for about 3 years when, in mid-2012, they engaged Ron Pujalte, GBMP Continuous Improvement Manager and Master Black Belt to assist with development of an employee idea system. Recognizing that Groov-Pin would benefit from moving toward an improvement culture that encourages "**everybody everyday**" to look for problems and suggest countermeasures, Ron felt some upfront visits to other local companies that had implemented successful employee idea systems would be helpful for Groov-Pin. "I wanted to open Groov-Pin's eyes to the difference between a Kaizen event culture and a culture of daily Kaizen, and I knew GBMP had several clients who could talk with them about the power of employee ideas and show them the kind of system and nurturing environment that is needed for success," said Ron.

Ron's collaborative approach in preparing the Groov-Pin team for idea system training and implementation activities involved sending a small group from Groov-Pin to tour two other local businesses. Benchmarking visits were arranged at Siemens Diagnostics in Walpole, and Optos, Inc. in Marlborough, Massachusetts. Both companies have strong idea systems that have been in place for some time.

After the visit to Optos, Jacky Beshar, Groov-Pin Vice President, was excited to get her team started. “I can’t thank Optos enough for the great tour. Our team was just exactly perfectly blown away seeing their Kaizen system and all the lean changes they have made. We were so excited to begin developing a first draft of an idea system for our own shops based on what our visits showed us.”

After the tours, the next step was to provide Problem Solving training for Groov-Pin employees, so they could begin to understand where to look for waste and learn proven methods for effectively solving problems. The follow on from that training was a 2-day Idea System Kaizen Event, where a cross functional team of Groov-Pin employees was coached on what makes an effective idea system and then outlined and set up plans to implement a system. At the end of the two days the group had defined their idea system, envisioned how to use Kaizen huddles and improvement boards and identified leaders and action items to put the idea system in place.

GBMP’s Development Director Jamie Millman spoke to Groov-Pin shortly after the new idea system was put in place. “They LOVED our approach! From the early tours at other companies, to the problem-solving training to the hands-on support provided to design and implement the system, Ron was able to help Groov-Pin gain the knowledge and confidence to build their own idea system. In the first week after the system was in place, 20 new ideas had already been implemented!”

Operations Manager Scott Bunn pointed to another example of how Ron’s problem solving training helped Groov-Pin work together to delight a customer. “We got a call for a rush order for something we had never made before and we asked the ‘why not’ question we learned from Ron to uncover what might get in the way of our ability to meet this customer’s need. The question was ‘Why not deliver in 3 days?’ in this case. Bottom line, several people across the value stream collaborated to enable this 1000 piece order to flow through our processes in 3 days, including outside processing! We really are capable of some awesome things when we leverage the knowledge and creativity of our people.”

Jacky Beshar summed up her feeling about the work with Ron and GBMP like this: “Thanks again for your terrific help moving us forward with our Groov-Pin Production System. We are stoked!”

For more information about Groov-Pin Corp. please visit www.groov-pin.com

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