Winning The Wars At Home

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By Jeff Reinke, Editorial Director

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In getting the privilege to tour and write about a fair number of companies and their perspectives on improving operations over the past year, it seems that the degree of separation between success and failure in manufacturing is often surprisingly minimal, especially from an individual task perspective.

So whether it was work cell improvement at Ingersoll-Rand, enhanced production flow at Raytheon or implementing new technology at Diebold, all of these organizations realized the benefits of paying closer attention to the little things, and, more importantly, secured buy-in from their workforce in implementing these changes.

Granted, these little things were the result of careful analysis, planning and a strong commitment to continuous improvement. They also represented ways of making a company more competitive on a larger, global scale.

One of the most intriguing, yet equally frustrating dynamics of the manufacturing realm is its global operating environment. On one hand this translates to endless opportunity, but with this opportunity comes an increase in competition, both on the local and international levels. The key to competing, and keeping your plant’s doors open as a result, can be maintaining a focus on the smaller, internal battles that will translate to larger, external wins.

The problem for many, however, is that the proximity of issues impacting a company's performance are kept too far away from those who can positively affect them. In other words, those running the business often fail to communicate their challenges and competitive obstacles to those running the plant and its individual assembly lines, work cells and distribution points. In the process, they're failing to take advantage of all the company's resources in overcoming their competitive adversities. That's where the aforementioned companies, as well as others cited in countless articles in *IMPO* and at www.impomag.com, *[1]* offer a wonderful perspective.

These companies have taken a closer look at things that can be done at home in generating greater prosperity across the globe. By winning internal battles with out-of-date SOPs, supplier agreements, material handling processes and distribution practices, these organizations are not only more competitive, but they've taken initial and progressive steps to include those who can impact the operational areas on a day-to-day basis. Advantages are not only captured in the present, but open to continuous improvement in the future.

Not every employee is going to understand, or even care to understand, many of the factors relating to operational enhancements. They do, however, care about steps that can be taken to get their product through a given process more quickly, or implementing a particular procedure that will help ensure better quality.

By bringing the game to them, you've allowed each worker to be a player. And while there are varying levels of competitiveness, no one I've ever hired wants to lose, especially when, in many cases, they're playing for their job.

To paraphrase Vince Lombardi – winning may not be everything, but in manufacturing it can be the only thing. By doing what it takes to win the battles at home, you and your company will be better positioned to win anywhere.

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