

Precision machiner Bryco hones in on Alliance services

Training and lean manufacturing support rapid growth

By Dave Wolkowitz

As a company dedicated to building its employees' skills, precision machining company Bryco Machine, Inc. invests heavily in employee training. "As a small machine shop, where most employees have come up through the ranks, there is a ton of internal training," Bryco Vice President Dennis Gilhooley said.

To help cover some of the training expense, the company in 2006 applied for a State of Illinois Employer Training Investment Program (ETIP) grant through a manufacturing trade organization. But when the trade organization's grant funds dried up, Bryco thought it was out of luck. That's when the Alliance for Illinois Manufacturing stepped in.

Following the money

"The Alliance still had money to distribute under the ETIP grant program. Once we got forms from the Alliance, supplying them with the information they needed to include us in their grant application was straightforward," Gilhooley said. "We were awarded grant funds for internal and external training."

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While working through the grant application process, the Alliance obtained data about Bryco that it used to locate other sources of funding. One of those sources was Chicago

Community Ventures, an organization that administers state funds for economic development. Bryco received a \$10 thousand dollar grant to pay for 50 percent of the cost of a new Web site and a sales order streamlining program.

"The sales order streamlining program enabled me to reduce what was previously a fifteen *hour* per week job to fifteen *minutes* per week," Gilhooley said, "and the program improved accuracy on top of the time savings."

Manufacturing processes improvement

"Some of the best benefits of working with the Alliance are the introductions it can provide to its partners. The Alliance's introduction to the Chicago Manufacturing Center (CMC) was a major impetus to the revitalization of our manufacturing process," Gilhooley said.

After Gilhooley and other Bryco employees attended a one of CMC's "Lean 101" seminars, they "completely adopted the philosophy" and implemented some of the ideas themselves. The next stage was to "bring CMC in to take Bryco through the whole lean program, and to reorganize the entire shop," Gilhooley said.

As a result of the lean reorganization of the shop floor, Bryco made room for four pieces of equipment it presently needed, as well as three more spaces for future expansion. Further, the setup time required to alter the shop floor to manufacture new items fell by approximately 70 percent. The shop floor redesign yielded additional space by removing toolboxes,

standardizing inspection stations, and otherwise changing the machinery layout.

Improving the training Regimen

According to Gilhooley, Bryco benefits from a long-term relationship with its employees. For instance, the company's shop foreman started sweeping the floors at age 18, and 16 years later is one of the top machining programmers in the area. However, despite its focus on training its employees, Bryco's training process was previously "without direction," Gilhooley said.

To help solve that problem, the Alliance introduced Bryco to Chicago Manufacturing Works, a productivity improvement organization affiliated with the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development.

"We undertook a two-fold process. First, Chicago Manufacturing Works fed us resumes of qualified candidates," Gilhooley said. "But they also worked with another company to develop a skill-set profile for every Bryco position. We developed profiles for setup person, operator, programmer, you name it. Then we evaluated our workforce, and performed a gap analysis to determine what skill sets we were lacking. That helped us put our arms around our training programs and bring our employees to the next level. We couldn't have done that on our own."

Culture transformation

Gilhooley said Bryco's association with the Alliance has helped transform the company's culture. Bryco was founded in 1982 by Bryan Bettinardi, who worked at his dad's machine shop throughout highschool, then became foreman. Bettinardi decided to start his own shop when his dad wouldn't give him a raise.

Gilhooley explained that because Bettinardi's brothers also started their own machining and manufacturing companies, help was always a phone call away. While Gilhooley

acknowledge that having such trusted sources of guidance can be great, he admitted diversity of perspectives may have been lacking.

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"It was always brother calling brother, but never any outside sources," Gilhooley said, "The Alliance opened our eyes to how other companies are doing things.

"Traditionally, everyone played their cards close to the vest in the manufacturing world. But now that manufacturing is a dying trade, people are working together to become successful."

Bryco appears to be finding success in its approach, as the company's sales have increased approximately 60 percent over the last two years. Gilhooley said the growth was made possible by the increased manufacturing capacity that allowed the company to serve its growing customer base.

"If we didn't take some of the actions, running as efficient as we are now, if we weren't running a lean system, we would not have been able to keep up with demand," he said.

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