

Challenging Conventional Wisdom

by Julie Markee, Key Process Innovations

At the 2015 Spring Management Meeting I had the pleasure to moderate a roundtable discussion with executives from across the continent on challenges they are facing within their organization. These executives shared their challenges, but also articulated some of the process improvement tactics that are working for them. What drives each of them is the desire to be constantly improving. And this desire isn't just focused on one aspect of the business. They apply this philosophy of constant improvement to all aspects of the business: Customers – Employees – Processes.

Business from the Customer's Perspective

Being willing to improve requires looking at your business from the customer's point of view even though that perspective might be uncomfortable. A few of these executives hired an outside firm to conduct surveys and focus groups to better understand how their customers view them. While the feedback was generally more positive than they expected, they did use that information as justification for capital investments or internal reorganization to address their weak areas.

TPM, Inc. also utilized an outside firm to ask their management team how they perceived the business was functioning. From this information, they restructured the work-flow, allowing employees to provide input on activities that better suited their strengths and their interests. As a result of the perception audits, both internal and external, Brad DeSplinter, General Manager of TPM, acknowledges that his business was much better prepared to weather the downturn in the oil industry. Designed Precision Castings also hired an outside firm to conduct a perception audit with their customers. But, they used that opportunity to further educate their customers on DPC's capabilities, as well as collect important customer feedback.

Operator Training

As technology is introduced into the foundry, it requires the operator have a higher skill level and finding operators with investment casting experience can be a challenge. They all concur that a cross-skilled workforce is key in order for them to be successful. In order to achieve that, a number of these foundries are using a skilled performance matrix, which rewards operators for being cross-skilled. Each of the executives agree that investing in a robust training program is



INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

Ford Bishop
Thompson Investment Casting

Brad DeSplinter
TPM, Inc.

Jan Holland
Designed Precision Casting, Inc.

Jeff Lantz
Tech Castings

Jeff Kuntz
Spokane Precision Casting

key to developing their employees and ultimately the success of their business.

Meet Customer Requirements, Not Perfection

As the topic turned to quality, there was consensus among the group that operators making parts too good, wasting time and resources, is a top frustration for executives. "We make parts to our customer specifications, not to perfection," shared Jeff Kuntz, Operations Manager of Spokane Precision. After reviewing several Gauge R&R studies, Kuntz found that 30-60 percent of all parts inspected are false positives, meaning the part meets customer requirements but the operator is fixing it anyway. Since many customers are further processing parts after delivery, these additional fixes are just wasting resources – however well intentioned.

So, how are these foundries addressing this issue? Spokane Precision posted the ASTM classification for visual

KEYPROCESSINNOVATIONS.COM



Analyze **Formulate**

Implement **Strengthen**

Introducing KPI-thrive

KPI-thrive trains your personnel on the investment casting process. Think of it as your personalized tool for implementing process control in your foundry. Engaged employees, less scrap and more productivity – a winning combination for improving your bottom line.



key process innovations

defects so that all the operators have a visual reference. Thompson Investment Casting provided their operators with a template that shows the level of defects that are acceptable for a part. TPM took a more drastic step and removed the welding equipment and reduced the availability of deburring guns. "An operator can't weld if he doesn't have a welder," disclosed DeSplinter. He shared that the quality of the parts hasn't been negatively impacted but there is significantly less reworking of castings.

Challenging Conventional Wisdom

This industry is full of "conventional wisdom" and often foundries are guided by these old wives' tales. We have all heard that certain aspects of the process must be done one specific way. But, this group is challenging these "truths" and they are finding most of them aren't accurate. Jan Holland, CEO of Designed Precision Castings, said to his team,

"We are a learning organization. Don't be afraid to try something different." And this approach is transforming their process. One of the challenges, and frustrations of this industry is you can't open a book to find the specific problem and resolution for your particular foundry. To truly resolve a problem, you have to break down the process to basic principles and then build it back up again. Some foundries are doing that, and finding that "conventional" wisdom can often be thrown out the window.

Summary

Each of these foundries has a unique process and as a result, require unique solutions. But, their approaches to process improvement are similar. Challenge convention wisdom, discover your strengths by hearing and responding to what your customers want and invest in your employees - particularly operator training.

Thank you to those of you who participated: Brad DeSplinter, TPM, Inc; Jeff Lantz, Tech Castings; Jeff Kuntz, Spokane Precision Casting; Ford Bishop, Thompson Investment Casting; Jan Holland, Designed Precision Casting, Inc.

Key Process Innovations helps investment casting foundries build on their existing processes by adding new technology, more efficient processes, customized training plans and better communication among your people. We'll guide you each step of the way with a clear plan, so you'll experience smoother business, less waste and higher profits.

Relax

**INCAST On The Go
is now available
wherever you go**



Visit our website
for more details
www.investmentcasting.org

