

## **Lean Training and Developing a Functional Plant Layout Helps Control Air to Grow**

### **Company Background:**

What began in 1987 as a 3 person company housed in a 4,000 square foot building, ControlAir, Inc. founded by Donald Comstock, is now located in a 28,000 square foot facility and has 52 employees.

Control Air located in Amherst, New Hampshire is a global manufacturer of precision air pressure regulators, I/P transducers, E/P transducers, P/I transducers, valve positioners, air relays, volume boosters, air filter regulators and frictionless diaphragm air cylinders.

The company is able to manufacture products to tightly controlled specifications and processes. This allows Control Air to offer solutions with higher performance standards, increased dependability and tighter quality standards than might be found elsewhere in the market. Their streamlined manufacturing process assures customers of product availability and on-time delivery.

Markets served by Control Air include medical, process control, automotive, quality systems, chemical, oil and gas just to name a few.

Donald's son Scott Comstock is now the President and CEO of Control Air. This year Scott and his employees are celebrating their 30<sup>th</sup> year of running a successful business.

### **Situation:**

"We operate on an MRP system and batch systems with many variables. I was familiar with Lean manufacturing but not sure it would help in our environment," said Scott Comstock.

But issues arose that Scott felt needed attention. "More continuous flow was needed. Inventory was just sitting there. We began experiencing delays in delivering our products on time to the customer," said Comstock. "We also had an additional 8,500 square foot space we wanted to expand into. That extra space was the opportunity we needed to look at the overall layout of our factory from processes to shipping."

### **Solution:**

Scott knew they needed to streamline operations, reduce inventory, and figure out how to maximize the use of the additional 8,500 square feet of space.

"In 2015 we began talks with a Project Manager from NH MEP to find out what types of training would help us with our situation," said Comstock. He liked what he heard and decided to enlist NH MEP to help them develop a company-wide training program to meet their needs.

The NH MEP training consisted of basic lean training in the areas of the 8 wastes, plant layout, visual factory, value and non-value added, standardization, 5S, also, flow and pull. The coaching and teaching portion is to have Control Air associates develop a functional flow layout diagram of the 8,500 square

foot area and adjacent current shipping and receiving, part storage, finished goods, and manufacturing areas, with future offices. The focus was for 1 to 2 product families.

### **Results:**

The Lean training helped Control Air in many ways. “The VSM helped us to improve continuous flow that doubled productivity through the line,” said Comstock. “It eliminated waste in various ways. It cut down on walking, and packing and unpacking. It also eliminated wasted inventory and improved the process flow overall.”

This allowed Control Air to take advantage of more opportunities and penetrate new markets. They could now also utilize the extra 8,500 square foot of space to expand their operations. Comstock sums up the results of the training this way, “By doing things more efficiently we can now react very quickly to increasing market demands. It helped us cut down on customer delivery delays significantly. But best of all we can more sell more product and that’s what counts.”

The following results for Control Air can be credited to having gone through the NH MEP Lean Training:

- \$50,000 in new sales in 2017
- Retained sales of \$25,000 in 2017 that otherwise would have been lost
- Retained 25 customer orders in 2017
- Added 2 new fulltime employees in 2017
- Increased investment in workforce practices or employee skills at the cost of \$10,000 in 2017
- Increased investment in new products or processes at the cost of \$10,000 in 2017
- Increased investment in plant or equipment at the cost of \$5,000 in 2017
- Increased investment in new information systems or software at the cost of \$2,500 in 2017
- Avoided unnecessary investments of \$2,500 in 2017

### **Testimonial:**

“The Lean training that we received helped erase previous internal resistance to the consideration of different ways to manufacture our product. Specifically the Value Stream Mapping process really opened our eyes to waste in movement, downtime and excess inventory. We were able to use this knowledge to build a production cell utilizing single piece flow and point of use inventory that greatly increased throughput.”

- *Scott Comstock, President and CEO of ControlAir, Inc.*