

VMEC Supervisory Leadership Development

Growing Supervisors & Leaders for a Lean Environment

Most supervisors are promoted from within, but too often without having any company-provided, structured training to help these individuals succeed in their new leadership roles. When Mike Rainville, President, Owner and Founder of Maple Landmark Woodcraft decided he wanted to develop the leadership capabilities of his team of Supervisors to become “Lean Leaders” capable of taking on the responsibilities of developing people and leading continuous improvement throughout the business, he contacted Professional Manufacturing & Business Growth Advisor Don Paul at VMEC. Mike recognized that he needed to build a supervisory/leadership team of ‘Lean Thinking’ leaders who would be able to free-up his limited time to allow him to focus more on strategic rather than tactical tasks.

Located in a modern, 28,000 square foot plant and factory store in Middlebury, Vermont, Maple Landmark has steadily grown as a family business since it was founded in the late 1970’s.

Today, the company has become the pre-eminent wooden toy manufacturer in the United States, by selling its unique lines of wooden toys and gifts through the Internet and through thousands of gift shops and toy stores across America and abroad. And recently, Mike Rainville received the very high honor of being named the *SBA 2017 Vermont Small Business Person of the Year*.

After assessing Mike’s leadership training and development goals and his ‘current state’ situation, Don recommended that Maple Landmark work with VMEC and trusted VMEC Service Provider, Jack Mastrianni, of Sustainable Growth Partners, to build the leadership capabilities of his supervisors and leaders. Jack was included in the project delivery plan because of his depth of experience and his particular specialty in supervisory and management development.

The Maple Landmark project began with a two-hour introduction / basic training on the supervisory role. This led to the kick-off of a full Supervisory Leadership training program. The primary focus of the introduction was to make Mike’s team more aware and more comfortable concerning the important roles and responsibilities associated with being a supervisor. It also created awareness within the management team of the multiple dimensions that leaders must operate in, while providing attendees a framework that illustrates helpful things to learn and to do in order to make their jobs more effective and satisfying. As a result of this introduction, Maple Landmark supervisors were able to understand why the role of supervisor is so important; learn their role and understand the uses of soft and hard skills; and feel more confident and capable handling the many hats that must be worn.

Other training agenda items included, but were not limited to: a) establishing the critical importance of a supervisor in meeting company goals; b) describing what it takes to be an effective supervisor; c) describing what effective supervisors do/don’t do; d) discussing the 6 characteristics of a workplace environment and the impact supervisors can have on those characteristics; e) learning the concepts of development and delegation as critical skills; and f) developing their teams and creating an energized workplace. A key objective in the Leadership development program was to have the right people, in the right roles, with the right behavior.

And as with many supervisory teams, without fundamental training in supervisory and

leadership skills, many on Mike's team were more comfortable just doing the work instead of leading improvements and developing others.

According to Mike Rainville, *"We've wanted to provide supervisory training for some time, as it has been many years since we last did anything for them. Previous training was centered on helping them handle the day-to-day challenges they face. Jack brought a broader view of what the supervisors mean to the company. We worked on areas that increased the value of the supervisory group, subjects like their own interaction as a team and the development of their own people. It hasn't been easy, but no improvement usually is."*

The initial session was followed by a more in-depth series designed to strengthen leadership and supervisory skills, and to help employees transition from doing 100% of the work to a balanced ratio of doing the work, nurturing their reports, and improving the process. A 'Soft Skills' training component encompassing three modules and focused on the human interaction side of being a good leader and supervisor was preceded by an organizational assessment that included a survey of training attendees. The three modules were: 1) Optimizing Team Effectiveness, 2) Building an Energizing Workplace, and 3) Developing and Coaching Others.

Finally, this foundational training dovetailed very nicely into "Leader Standard Work" in a Lean manufacturing environment - a critical step to ensure that a Lean culture in an organization prospers - and "Training Within Industry - Job Instruction," which teaches how we make sure that we train people according to a standard method.

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