



Center Stage Member Spotlight

Kevin Weldi - Tekfor Inc.



Kevin Weldi, President and Director of the Americas at Tekfor Inc., is no stranger to turn-around management. Before accepting his job at Tekfor Inc., an automotive and innovative manufacturing company located in Wooster, Ohio, Weldi had successfully led four different companies through the same process that he was set to embark on next. Relying on his technical and leadership skills, Weldi's management style focused on company culture, performance, innovation, and community engagement. The initial turnaround took Weldi and his team 18 months and they haven't looked back since.

In June of 2010, Kevin Weldi walked into a "mess of opportunity", better known as Tekfor, Inc. Prior to his arrival, Tekfor had lost money every year since its doors opened in 2001. The plummeting plant was shipping bad parts to customers on a regular basis. The company had received 232 customer complaints the previous year, which was more than one per day. The road ahead was going to be challenging, but Weldi saw the opportunities on the other side. He began by asking all employees, one simple question, "what's wrong with the plant?". Not to his surprise, there were 136 concerns. With this information, Weldi and his team broke them down into five segments and took the top three from each and got to work. The subtle involvement of his employees during this process helped set the table for their culture. Their voices were heard, their opinions mattered, and they felt a sense of belonging. Relationships and trust were beginning to form, and a community was starting to develop.

As improvements were being made and the company culture continued to strengthen, quality performance and innovation began to shine bright. The two core values were not just catchy phrases written in some manual, they were livable, breathable actions seen all throughout the workplace. Weldi contributes the company's performance and innovation to his hard-working team, "We have a lot of great people here. We treat people like family, and they realize we care about them more than just paying them to come to work. You can't make people like work all the time but if they really like who they're working for and the purpose, they perform."

Once the company's reputation began changing within, Weldi knew it was time to extend its impact beyond the plant's four walls. By focusing on community engagement, Tekfor and Weldi have both become active members in the Wayne County Community. From sponsoring local teams and events to donating gifts during the holidays, Tekfor has done a remarkable job supporting the community and more specifically the youth of the area. Weldi emphasized, "We try to get folks interested in local business because they don't need to go out of town to get a job." Tekfor has invested in several educational resources including the RAMTEC program at Wayne County Schools Career Center and the robotics department at Triway High School.

In addition to Tekfor's community engagement, Weldi himself joined the Wayne Economic Development Council (WEDC) five years ago and currently serves on their Advisory Council. Weldi joined WEDC because he wanted to contribute to all the hard work done behind the scenes. The Advisory Council meets monthly to discuss initiatives that focus on strengthening Wayne County's community assets, influencing retention, expansion and attraction. Weldi has truly enjoyed providing guidance and leadership to those throughout the community. He is extremely passionate about Wayne County and stated, "Out of all the towns I've lived in, it is the best connected and it feels like a small, big town. It's been a blessing to be a part of this community. I've lived in a lot of different places, but I can tell you I haven't lived anywhere that I've enjoyed more than Wooster."

Tekfor's continued success led to a building expansion in 2016 and Wayne County's Chamber of Commerce Business of the Year award in 2017. However, not all success stories come without a bump or two in the road – except this bump turned out to be more like a boulder. When the COVID-19 pandemic began its destructive path around the world, Tekfor was caught in the crossfire. As a result of the automotive industry shutting down for eight weeks, Weldi and his team were left with some tough decisions, but their strong company culture helped them pull through. For the first time in his life, Weldi had to furlough his employees. He explained, "Our challenge was trying to treat people fairly in a really difficult situation. We were honest and handled it well and we brought them back as soon as possible."

Senior management individually talked to each employee on a weekly basis, checking in on them and helping them with whatever they could. To Weldi's surprise, he said, "The interesting thing about it is the plant got closer. It's amazing how people help each other. It wasn't just us helping but a lot of people reached out to other people in the company. They got help from others. It brought us a lot closer as a plant than ever before."

Thankfully, Tekfor is back to business as usual. The future of the company is bright, with another possible expansion on the horizon, Tekfor is looking to capitalize on future trends. They are actively seeking opportunities in e-mobility, PHEVs (Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles), and vertical integration. Weldi specified, "We would like to be more precise in finishing operations. We're trying to make sure we get closer and closer to that end-user."

Tekfor Inc. has locked in its base business through 2030, which has given them the security to shift gears and allow the company to truly grow and diversify its business.

