



10 minutes a day spells success

The general manager of Haldex Hydraulics in North Carolina has learned the secret to increasing productivity and profit — improving communication, setting benchmarks and evaluating the results of implemented plans. In a nutshell it's LDMS.

Text and photos Dwight Cendrowski

RICH DOMBECK knows how to win. From his years racing motorcycles to his current award-winning 1990 Nissan 300zx Twin Turbo sports car, he's always found a way to come out on top. But the lesson that resonates most for him came from his stint on a pit crew for a motorcycle racing team "It's just all teamwork," he says. "When we're trying to satisfy customers, it's total teamwork."

Dombeck is general manager of the Haldex Hydraulics plant in Statesville, North Carolina, a beautiful wooded



A problem-solving opportunity

LDMS, or Lean Daily Management System, was developed by the Kaufman Global Consulting Firm. Rich Dombeck, along with Assembly Supervisor Audrey Crider, adapted it for use in the Statesville plant. Basically a daily management tool, LDMS provides the groundwork for improving communication, setting benchmarks, and finally evaluating the results of the implemented plans.

Crider smiles as she notes the changes from

Dombeck's introduction of LDMS. "It alleviated some of my gray hairs," she says. "He introduced LDMS, and it really made the difference. It took off. Everybody bought into it." And now, after three years, employees from every area of the plant meet for 10 minutes each day in groups of eight or 10, discussing problems and working on solutions. Each group has its own display board where members chart their progress. And, most important, it provides a

area not far from the city of Charlotte. The plant produces hydraulic gear pumps for big clients such as John Deere and Dana. Rich Dombeck came to the plant in March 2004. Today the plant is shipping almost twice as much per day as it was back in 2004. Says Dombeck, "We set a sales record in April, we beat it in May, and we beat it again in June."

Dombeck credits an employee empowerment system – LDMS or Lean Daily Management System – for the improvement at Statesville. He adapted this work cell management program that brings machinists, assemblers, production control and material handlers together for a 10-minute meeting every day. "It's what has to happen today," he explains. "Not big picture. Not 30, 60, 90 days, but what has to happen today. That's where you need to focus."

And Dombeck knows about focus. Always interested in mechanical things, he grew up in New Philadelphia, Ohio, with his two brothers. He earned degrees in mechanical engineering and a business administration from universities in Ohio. He then worked for the Parker Hannifin Company in various capacities that ranged from manufacturing engineer to plant manager in five different cities in the United States before joining Haldex.

Dombeck began racing motorcycles while still in high school, and continued into the early 1990s. One crash saw his bike slip out from him while traveling 75 miles per hour, but he walked about without serious injuries. He laughs as he recalls his father saying to him, "Well, did you hit your head hard enough to knock some sense into you?" To which Dombeck answered, "No, I landed on my butt."

After hanging up his racing helmet for good, he started looking for a sports car to buy, finally settling on a bright-red Nissan 300zx Twin Turbo. He's won many awards at car shows over the years, recently earning a best in show in June. "As impressive as that car is, I really don't drive the car fast at all," he explains. Instead, his joy is keeping it in immaculate condition, inside and out. Even the engine shines, with every component buffed to a bright luster.

Dombeck sees communication as the key to success in the plant. He's comfortable strolling the floor and visiting with the 138 employees. Of course, in his job you have to understand manufacturing, he says. But all the technical degrees are not enough. "You need to understand people.



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They can teach you the chemistry and the fluid dynamics and all that, but they don't tell you how to work with people. Whether you're an engineer or a supervisor, you need those skills."

The LDMS program has helped dramatically in improving the plant output. Employees feel safe contributing their ideas, and simple communication solved some long-standing problems. Dombeck also brought in trainers to run seminars to give employees strategies for working together.

Dombeck keeps setting the bar higher, both for himself and for his employees. He recently sold his boat, because there was just no time to use it. In the plant most Saturdays, he just has time for his car shows and an occasional round of golf, explaining with pride that he shot his first eagle on July 4. ■

RICH DOMBECK AT-A-GLANCE

Family: Grew up in New Philadelphia, Ohio, with two brothers. Single, he now lives in Lake Norman, a lake community 25 miles from Statesville plant. Drives to work on back roads. "To me a traffic jam is three crows setting in the road," he says.

Education and career: Associate's degree in mechanical engineering technology, a bachelor's in mechanical engineering and a master's in business administration. Worked for Parker Hannifin before joining Haldex in March 2004.

Current interests: Golf and competing at car shows with his 1990 Nissan 300ZX Twin Turbo sports car.

safe place for any employee to make suggestions and to feel he or she is a vital part of the operation.

Areas of discussion can include production levels, scrap, quality issues and late deliveries. Dombeck gives an illustration from one group, the Iron Man Team. Threads on the gear pumps were being machined too deeply, adding 10 minutes to assembly time for each pump. "The problem was the people who could fix it were not even aware there was a problem," explains Dombeck. "Once they got on their LDMS team, and machinists heard

what the problem was, they said 'That's easy to fix.' Then every day they started tracking it, and within one month the problem went away."

Emphasizes Dombeck, "This problem had existed for years!"

So successful has the Statesville LDMS program been in empowering employees and improving production that it has spread throughout Haldex and is used in virtually every plant in the world. Says Crider, "There's a comfort zone [for employees]. It's not pointing fingers. It's an opportunity to solve a problem."

Dombeck leans forward as he describes tearing down a wall between departments in the plant. "Someone came up to me and said, 'I see you're taking both the walls down.' And I said 'What do you mean both the walls?' He said 'With LDMS there's no longer a wall between machining and assembly, and I see you took a sledge hammer and took the physical wall down.'"

With LDMS there's immediate performance feedback. Meeting attendance is charted, and everyone shares in problem-solving. It's focused. It's brief. And it works. ■