



## Case Study

# Heritage Bathrooms– starting the lean journey

### Proud Heritage

Heritage J Ceramics was set up in 1995. Heritage has four manufacturing sites and four distributions sites. Out of its turnover of £35m, manufacturing accounts for £10m.



A new management team was created in 2003 bringing new styles and concepts.

Heritage is an innovative manufacturer of bathroom products.

It operates at the quality end of the market offering independent bathroom retailers an attractive ‘package concept’- high levels of availability allied to innovative design and product quality.



It sells 80%-90% of its products in the UK and created an industry first with its priced catalogue.

### Creating a climate for change

At Yorkshire Productivity’s May Members’ event which took place at Heritage, Brian Keeley, Divisional Director of Heritage Ceramics, welcomed visitors to the Brighthouse sites. Brighthouse houses both an acrylics and a Ceramics plant.

In a very open and honest review, Brian explained that Heritage was just starting along the lean journey.

Training for everyone, from the management team throughout the Brighthouse operation, started in August 2004.

Prior to this there had been little training for 10 years.

There was some resistance to changing the ingrained culture of ‘we have always done it this way’.

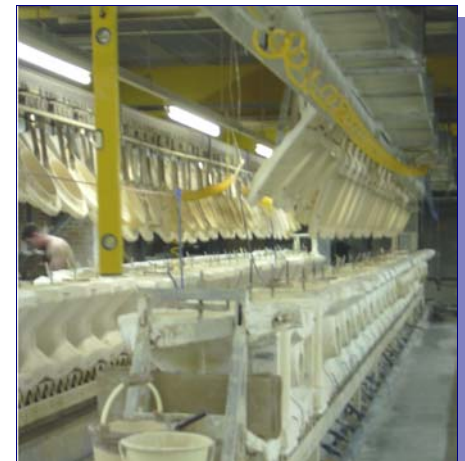
Most staff bought in to the concept of change but, understandably, some fell by the wayside.

Heritage J started with 5s, Kaizen and Standard Operations training. Implementation was still to be undertaken and it was important to ensure that everyone was thoroughly up to speed.

In terms of the lean journey, Heritage was still at the Foundation Level. Brian



could see that it was important to ensure Heritage’s staff had the skills to be able to progress to the next level and were not left behind.



Therefore, in order to support their lean training activity, **NVQ Level 2 Business Improvement Techniques** was offered to the staff and, without being ‘press ganged’, 25 people volunteered for training.

In addition, ‘**Skills for Life**’ training was also being introduced. There was a need for a period of consolidation so Heritage could move forward to the next stage and take everyone with them.



He likened the journey to building the Forth Road Bridge. Strong foundations were required to link the various elements and, even when it was 'finished', maintenance would be on-going.



## Lean Benefits

Even at this early stage, the practical advantages of adopting a lean ethos were becoming apparent:

- ◆ There had been a massive reduction in work in progress. This had freed up space and improved overall results.
- ◆ There was a much greater sense of employee involvement and empowerment.
- ◆ Scrap and work in progress were being designed out of the system.
- ◆ Labour costs had fallen.
- ◆ The rest of the Heritage business had new found respect for the activities of the Brighthouse site.
- ◆ A team ethos was being created.
- ◆ Staff were hungry for more training and took pride and pleasure in their performance.
- ◆ The business now manufactured for orders—not stock



Brian readily praised Yorkshire Productivity as being instrumental in providing direction through structured training.

## The Lean Gospel is spreading

A very noticeable feature of the members' events is that, mainly, they are now attended by several members of staff from visiting companies — not just the company principals.

This is proof positive that the culture of lean is being integrated throughout organisations and not just taken on board by the leaders.

Although Heritage is at the very beginning of its lean journey, this culture is also very evident within the Brighthouse business — staff are already positive to the extent of being evangelical about the merits of implementing lean principles.



Fifty-five visitors were treated to Bacon butties as the meeting made a prompt start at 8a.m.

Twelve visiting companies, covering markets from furniture to aerospace, illustrated that networking and benchmarking is a major attraction and crosses boundaries between industries.

The visitors split into two groups to tour the Ceramics and Acrylics operations. Lean training has still to be started at the Acrylics operation.

Guides from the plants described the



operations to the visitors.

The impact of lean was clearly visible in the Ceramics plant in terms of the amount of space which had been created to form an orderly, structured manufacturing environment.

Staff extolled the virtues of the new culture which reduced internal friction, gave a greater sense of ownership, pride and involvement.

Returning to the meeting, visitors were clearly impressed by what they had seen and vocally acknowledged the enthusiasm they had witnessed from the staff.

Brian concluded with his vision for the near future. Progress would be made through the 9 lean steps and the business was considering opening up the Skills for Life training to its employees' families.

The development of new skills would be supported, maintaining faith in the workforce to ensure the culture of the business continued to change for the better.

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