

Master Workholding of Morganton Pursues *Eureka! Winning Ways* IES Service Leads Company to New Profitable Projects

Brainstorming and generating new ideas is daily business for a company making customized products. Yet, with a little help, Master Workholding of Morganton got a head start on their next new profitable projects with the Eureka! Winning Ways program offered by IES. At least a half million dollars are expected to be saved annually.



Master Workholding produces workholdings for the auto, aerospace, defense and medical industries.

During the company's initial E!WW session, Master Workholding's team generated 70 new ideas, and through the E!WW patented Merwyn screening process, decided to move two ideas into the Trailblazer development and discovery phases of the process.

Master Workholding designs and builds custom prismatic workholdings for the production machining industry. The privately-held company is headquartered in Morganton, with offices in Indianapolis, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Monterrey, Mexico. With 45 employees, Master Workholding's primary clients are in the defense, auto, aerospace, and medical fields, and it equally splits its sales between domestic and international business.

Two Ideas

The company engineers and builds its custom products unique for each customer. As a result, brainstorming, idea generation, and problem solving are ongoing processes in the company. Yet when the company president Mike Powell heard about the Eureka! Winning Ways program offered by IES, he was intrigued by the concept and the potential for acquiring a more systematic and organized process.

The first idea generated by the E!WW process was for a lifetime warranty on all specially designed and built products, a benefit that no one else offers. The company is currently determining the impact of a warranty, both from a customer and bottom line perspective before proceeding with it.

The second idea was to bring in-house the heat treatment and black oxidization of metals processes into the plant. Both of these processes had been outsourced to two separate vendors. The company had previously considered internalizing these processes, but had quickly rejected the idea because of the intense regulations and risk involved in each.

This time, however, the E!WW process did not allow the company to immediately "shoot down the idea," Powell said. "The last time the idea came up we were smaller, but now

our company is bigger and we have the personnel to deal with the regulations. Plus, new processes are now available that reduce the hazard in the black oxide process.”

Saving Half Million Annually

Moving these processes in-house has gained the company up to a month in process time, faster project shipment, increased capacity, and cost savings up to half a million dollars annually. The savings in outsourcing will offset the cost of the equipment in only one year. And the increased capacity will enable the company to take in more orders and increase sales immediately.

In addition to these two initial ideas, the company has gained the ability and confidence to implement other new ideas more rapidly. As a result, it has moved forward with two additional ideas: opening an engineering facility in Indianapolis to better service clients and developing a tech transfer facility in Mexico.

IES offers Eureka! Winning Ways through the federal Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP). As part of this national network, IES can bring improvements discovered elsewhere to North Carolina businesses. MEP offers Eureka! Winning Way in partnership with Doug Hall of Eureka! Ranch in Cincinnati. The program is the first scientifically-based process to guide companies to systematically and significantly grow their businesses. The program provides a disciplined methodology and analytical tools to create new ideas, discover market opportunities for these ideas, and efficiently drive the best ideas into development.

“This process has forced us to think about what we wanted to do and focus on,” Powell said. “In the past, we had plenty of ideas but didn’t really effectively focus on any of them to move them forward and implement them with a focused approach. Now we have a process that makes us slow down—just a bit—to consider and implement each idea intelligently.”

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