



Process Advancement Teams (PAT) at Hunter Douglas, Window Fashions Division

It is not uncommon at Window Fashions Division(WFD) to hear employees say “I’ve got an idea on how to make my process better. Can I help to improve things?”

Nowadays, thanks to Hunter Douglas’ systematic approach to continuous improvement, it is just as common to hear team members exclaim, “We did it! We made it better...and we saved a bundle!”

At WFD’s Honeycomb Business Unit, employees have been successfully involved in continuous improvement for over two years. It began in late 1996 with the formation of the Division’s first Process Advancement Team (PAT). The Honeycomb Business Unit’s original PAT’s were comprised solely of “the experts...those individuals who actually did the day-to-day work in the targeted processes”. After objectives and team leaders were identified by management, sign-up lists were posted, and interested employees volunteered. These first PAT’s were boundless in their enthusiasm, and started making significant contributions in their very first year.

In the year 2000, Hunter Douglas asked Conway Management to help them develop a customized continuous improvement process which incorporated the concepts and tools of the Right Way To Manage® with the principles of Appreciative Inquiry. The result was “Focus on Excellence”(FOE). The WFD initially trained approximately 80 people in the FOE process which

spawned several very successful improvement teams. Master trainers and coaches were then selected and trained to deliver training internally and to facilitate teams and improvement efforts throughout the division.

As a result of the Introduction to Excellence classes and mastering the Conway approach, the response and results were even better. The PATs began incorporating the Seven Steps to Excellence approach into their work midway through the year. The Honeycomb Business Unit had a large number of employees trained to be FOE coaches who could facilitate team meetings. The FOE methodology added to employees existing enthusiasm, resulting in the PAT’s that were producing some amazing results.

Here’s a sample of what was accomplished by the Honeycomb Business Units PATs in the year 2000. The Printing PAT reduced printing defects by 32% over the previous year. They saved a total of \$155,696 (MLO - Material Labor Overhead) in year 2000 alone. Because the root causes of the waste had been identified and corrected, the savings will continue into the future. Similarly, the End of Color PAT reduced that defect by 15%, resulting in savings of \$217,268 (MLO) in the year 2000. The Stacking PAT saved \$80,842 (MLO). The Inspection PAT reduced mislabeled cartons and material by 40% for the year,

while the Safety PAT helped reduce reportable accidents from 16 in 1999, to 10 for all of the Business Unit in 2000. The Fabric PAT reorganized late in the year and is now successfully partnered with some of the company’s vendors working towards improving the fabric yield from the vendors.

These successful teams did not work in a vacuum. They were encouraged to take on big issues and involve any and all employees necessary to get the job done. The response they received has been excellent, with resources on the floor and all offices pitching in when their skill was needed.

Beginning this New Year, the sign-ups for new PATs has been phenomenal. Twenty-four additional people who had not been part of a PAT last year, signed up. On the heels of last year’s successes, even more employees want to be in on the ground floor of FOE’s cost-savings process. The FOE Seven Steps of Excellence are being used right from the start to identify causes. An FOE Master Trainer is assigned to assist the teams in a variety of ways in order to increase the effectiveness of the waste reduction process. The first meeting for each team begins with a customized team building session designed to jump start their efforts.

Thanks to their ongoing training and dedication, The Honeycomb Process Advancement Teams are most assuredly Focused on Excellence and making continuous improvement a way of life in the 21st Century.