

Affordable assessment and advice

It is not easy to find a suitably experienced person to advise Australian manufacturers on factory productivity. Lean Manufacturing Ltd, owned and operated by David Lawrence, is offering the industry a very affordable and sound range of well packaged support options, which I welcome the opportunity to write about.



Lean Manufacturing has a strong background in kitchens, cabinets, furniture, joinery, shop fitting, windows and doors, and timber machining.

David has 20 years production management experience in cabinets and furniture manufacturing including 12 years as cell production manager for Criterion Manufacturing (some 300 staff working 24 hours a day, 365 days a year). He is now consulting to a wide range of progressive manufacturers throughout Australia and New Zealand including Spence Doors (60 staff – Melbourne), Comace Shop Fitters (30 staff – Adelaide), Packers Wardrobe and Aluminium Doors (30 staff – Adelaide), Pfitzner Furniture (25 staff – Adelaide), Greenmount Kitchen and Cabinet Manufacturing (52 staff – Auckland) to name just a few.

David offers three consultancy options, namely:

- One day on site business

assessment. This involves a comprehensive audit of how the business is operating including strong focus on process, systems, software and productivity review.

- One week on site business assessment, process mapping and action plan creation. This involves speaking with all key management at length, a comprehensive audit a detailed report of how the business is running and listing of recommendations of how it should be running – including strong focus on process, systems, software and productivity review.

- Two hours per fortnight by phone and across the web on-going support. This involves assessment of reports from the client's software and writing a fortnightly report confirming progress with processes, systems, software and productivity over the last fortnight.

As David has extensively experience with all forms of industry software he also assists with all of the following:

- kitchen, cabinet and furniture design software;
- optimisation software;
- costing, bill of materials, quoting and job cost software;
- CRM client management software;
- Time Tracking software –

using PCs on the factory floor;

- production planning and job scheduling software.

David said: "I have been using a variety of different industry software for well over 15 years. My clients generally have major problems in one part of their businesses that the right piece of software can quickly remedy. I find many manufacturers have typical problems, which include:

- poor job or product costing and quoting – usually on Excel;
- manual and poor materials ordering and poor management of purchase orders and associated materials supply dates;
- no proper system to manage prospective client contact dates;
- fluctuating and at times low factory productivity – with no recording of staff times on each job (ie without using PCs and time tracking software to manage factory staff);
- scheduling current and forward jobs using Excel and whiteboards.

"In the last three years, with the increased competition from Chinese imports and the economy flattening out in parts of Australia and dropping substantially in New Zealand, I see the more professional and progressive manufacturers getting more of the available



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work and the less professional and progressive manufacturers getting less work with many falling by the wayside," he explained.

"One of the primary reasons more professional and progressive manufacturers continue to get a larger piece of the pie is they generally have far better processes and systems. Good software use generally commences at design, and progresses to panel optimisation and direct CNC machine instruction, with a contact database for client and management of quotations, time tracking all jobs and staff, job costing of jobs and job scheduling.

"While some of my clients have no experience with the wide range of software systems available, I do have considerable experience and can assist quite quickly. Other mistakes many manufacturers make include having no formal 'key performance indicators' – so no production figures are properly monitored daily and weekly and no written 'action plan' is prepared for the next quarter or six or twelve monthly period. I also help clients in these areas."

I phoned several of David's manufacturing clients and report their comments as follows:



Graham Russell, the owner of Greenmount Manufacturing (52 staff kitchen, cabinet and joinery shop based in Auckland), said: "We had David on site for a week to implement our scheduling software, which went very well as we had it up and running within the week. This will dramatically improve our production scheduling and increase our factory productivity significantly.

"We now engage David to assist us four hours a week on going support – he dials in across the web and reviews the reports in our time tracking and scheduling software and writes us a two page fortnightly report for myself and my production manager.

"The two main benefits of involving David as an on-going consultant is, firstly, it is continual independent review of our factory productivity and secondly, it really keeps the momentum up on our time tracking and job scheduling projects. David works well with my production management team where working together 'two and two equals five'."



Paul Williams, the owner of Comace Interior Fit Outs (26 staff based in Adelaide), said: "It was valuable to have a production manager of his high calibre to implement the Empower scheduling software we purchased, which David implemented successfully in one week.

"David's help enabled us to 'hit the ground running' and

get maximum gains from the software within the first few days.

"We are excited about David coming on board providing on going two hours a week support of our Time Tracking and Scheduling software and overall production. His knowledge and experience will be essential for Comace to move forward productively.

"I think it's important to have David as an outside view of how the company is operating and he will pick up areas that could go unnoticed by my team on the inside. Scheduling has allowed us to forecast where we will be most busy and concentrate on filling in those areas that are not as busy.

"David has given us a good start. However, with his continued guidance we will constantly improve our productivity and production".



David Pfitzner, one of the owners and managers of Pfitzner Furniture (25 staff – solid timber custom furniture based in Adelaide) said: "I run PCs in the factory with Empower time tracking software. October 2010 Empower gave me their Scheduling software to trial, which lead me to question the way I set up time tracking.

"It was great to have David Lawrence (cabinet maker/production manager) visit our factory. David's depth of experience and practical knowledge of Empower was impressive. David spoke my language, which was great. I ran through my proposed changes, we came up with the best way to achieve my goals and he instructed me on the most effective way to implement them in Empower.

"David Lawrence's involvement was very valuable and worthwhile. I will get David to help implement our job scheduling software next month."



Ron Higgins, the Operations Manager of Spence Doors (50 factory staff manufacturing architectural doors and pressed metal door frames in their Melbourne factory) said: "Our business is quite complex and our front line management team have full time roles. I preferred to engage David Lawrence to be here on site a week at a time, over three periods, to progress the implementation of our time tracking software as he has substantial industry production and time tracking software experience.

"David's involvement has allowed us to implement the software quickly. Through David setting up the software correctly we are starting to receive accurate information on process and product times now being reported. Spence Doors will be progressing to an integrated job scheduling software this year so accurate budgeted process times are an essential component of accurate job scheduling, which David has helped us achieve.

"David also assists us with on going weekly support for two hours a week where David remotely reviews our database and reports and advises us of all the current productivity issues and recommended courses of action. We will engage David again shortly to implement our scheduling software."

I asked David: "Tell me about one of the most enjoyable projects you have worked on?" Hereplied: "I implemented PCs on the factory floor and time tracking software at Asset Kitchens and got 13 staff down

to eight staff and, at the same time, got production levels up significantly – all within four months.

"The owners, Paul and Jenny Wilson are personal friends of mine and achieving this result was immensely satisfying as they really needed to improve their factory productivity to improve their profit.

"Prior to this project I has worked for Criterion Manufacturing where I used PCs on the factory floor and time tracking software from 1995 to report on daily, staff and job productivity. I had confidence that Asset Kitchens clearly needed this same software to maximise production and control their factory labour. At Asset Kitchens we used Empower Software."

I also asked David: "Why have you chosen such a low hourly charge out rate for your consultancy business considering your 20 years' production management experience?" David said: "The key mistake I believe most consultants make is they charge between \$100 to \$150 an hour, which is prohibitively expensive and not affordable for the substantial majority of cabinet makers and joiners.

"On the projects these consultants do carry out, they spend little time on site and I don't believe they get to really know the business sufficiently well and, accordingly, their advice is not as sound as it could and should be.

"In comparison I charge 'significantly less than cabinet makers rates', at \$40 an hour, so clients can afford to retain me to provide two to four hours a week on going support across the web and repeat weekly projects.

"As I am passionate about manufacturing and systems I enjoy being busy and I enjoy choosing the projects I work on. Further the more consultancy I do the greater I build my experience base which is invaluable to my business." ●