

One-Steel Gets Stronger Through Frontline Problem Solving

The challenges facing the steel industry have been well documented in the last few years with falling margins and decreased demands, due to the depressed construction sector and rising costs.

To gain a competitive advantage, structural steel pipe and tube makers **One-Steel Somerton** (Victoria) began to utilise the Six-Sigma approach to problem solving. Even though some success was achieved, Operations Manager Brett Perrin felt there was still a gap in engaging all levels of employees in the problem solving process.

To enhance One-Steel's knowledge Brett's Maintenance Manager, Sud Chakrabarti attended one of CTPM's public 2-day Getting TPM & Lean to Work workshops in 2011. On the strength of the feedback from this workshop, Brett decided to use CTPM's Frontline Problem Solving approach delivered through a 12 week in-house program at the Somerton plant.

The **Frontline Problem Solving program (FLPS)** kicked-off in March 2012 with 6 functional work teams of 5 people in each. As part of the program the Somerton site had to select their own problems they wished to tackle. The problems selected by the teams were not only causing downtime and quality losses but were also causing excessive frustration amongst the workers.

The FLPS program began with a one-day classroom session where participating teams were educated in the 7 step problem solving process. This session was then followed by fortnightly team meetings to continue to

progress through the problem solving process, which included: problem definition, analysis, countermeasure and standardisation.

Figure 1: "Orange Crew" in action during an FLPS meeting



Figure 2: Team "Electrical" in action



At the end of the 14 weeks the teams tackled a total of 16 workplace problems and put in countermeasures for over 80% of these. Teams also identified over 10% of opportunity

for improvement in availability across both mills at Somerton of which 3% has already been achieved. This has led to improved capacity to make product and a reduction in overtime costs.

Brett Perrin was very happy with the tangible results the program produced, however it was surprisingly the improvement in teamwork that really excited him about the program.

At the Somerton plant each crew works on a rotating shift roster and as a result does not get the chance to work closely with other crews. This can lead to miscommunication, misunderstanding and occasional conflict. Whilst “The One Best Way” One-Steel philosophy is about standardisation and sharing learning, the introduction of the FLPS process assisted the crews at Somerton to establish a common problem solving language and common goals in the elimination of their selected problems.

Some observations obtained by the teams during this program were:

- Team members were able to discuss potentially emotive topics in a ‘no blame’ environment by focusing on facts and data and validating any assumptions that were previously held;
- The FLPS process cut out wasted time within meetings by focusing strongly on a documented process including the use of the A3 sheet to capture each step;
- The FLPS language quickly found its way into daily use at the plant;
- Team members became better at identifying logic flaws in their own thinking regarding their problems; and
- Teams were able to better understand their own manufacturing processes by challenging long held assumptions they had about each problem.

The employees at the Somerton plant realise that the process of problem solving is never ending. Once they have tackled and fixed their reactive problems they will then raise the bar ‘proactively’ and increase their own targets for safety, quality, productivity and cost.

It has been said that developing your people may seem like ‘going the long way around’ in pursuing your organisational goals but as Brett Perrin and his employees at One-Steel’s Somerton plant have shown it is actually the only true short-cut to achieving sustainable results.

Figure 3: One-Steel employees discuss frontline problems at their daily operational meeting



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