

CASE STUDY

PUTTING A PLAN IN PLACE FOR FOOD & BEVERAGE SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

Many food and beverage (F&B) plants are labor-intensive, with high potential for injuries and accidents. And when safety is a concern — when workers worry about being hurt — performance also suffers, as inattention damages quality, productivity, and reliability.

Fortunately, Performance Solutions by Milliken — the operations-excellence consultancy of Milliken & Company — has a rigorous, easy-to-deploy assessment and improvement process that creates safer working environments and improves operational performance.

CLIENT

This Midwestern F&B company has facilities at each stage of the poultry supply chain — from hatchery operations/egg farms to poultry maturity to processing and packaging. Performance Solutions has assisted in all the company's production environments.

PERFORMANCE-IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITY

The company contracted with Performance Solutions to improve safety. Bill Kelsey, a Performance Solutions practitioner, began the engagement by assessing a processing plant's operations. This facility is small by industry standards, with approximately 400 employees processing 1 million chickens per week.

Hand injuries are common in F&B processing environments, from knives and cutting machines. At the same time, strains and sprain injuries were frequently reported in this plant, due

to uncomfortable working positions and lifting requirements. Plant leaders become aware of Performance Solutions and Milliken's impressive safety record by attending safety conferences and through Performance Solutions' program of:

Accommodate

Executive teams are invited to Spartanburg, S.C., to become acquainted with Performance Solution leadership and staff.

Educate

Performance Solutions presents the fundamentals of the Milliken Performance System (MPS) to visiting executives, identifying how the system works within Milliken, and the results that have been achieved.

Demonstrate

Executives visit high-performance Milliken facilities, witnessing first-hand what MPS looks like, and enhanced engagement levels among managers and production associates alike.

WORKING WITH PERFORMANCE SOLUTIONS PRACTITIONERS

The Performance Solutions plant assessment involves three phases over three days. The first phase is a plant-safety walkthrough, during which Kelsey looks for hazards, observes behavioral issues (e.g., someone reaching across a moving line), reviews recent audits,

and explores conditions that contribute to an unsafe workplace. The second phase consists of interviews with 20 to 25 percent of plant employees (approximately 100 interviews in the Midwest plant), both management and hourly.

The third phase is the "management path," says Kelsey. "We talk to the plant manager, the HR manager, and the safety manager. We do a deep dive into their processes. We look at business processes — what they measure, what's critical for them to measure, current performances

in their plant — and thoroughly examine their environment: Do they have a safety process? Do they have an investigation process? What does it cover? How deeply do they investigate incidents? Which incidents do they investigate?”

The management path covers multiple production topics and explores the plant’s climate for change. “What do they believe will be roadblocks? What is their burning platform for change?” Performance Solutions has developed a specific interview format to gauge an organization’s appetite for change,

allowing practitioners to rapidly see how to approach the engagement.

At the end of the F&B plant’s assessment, Kelsey met with managers and reviewed findings, including a summary of employee interviews analyzing common responses (e.g., “evaluate morale on a grading scale of A, B, C, D, F”). Because the interviews are anonymous, Kelsey can also bring up sensitive topics, such as problems with specific employees, managers, or policies.

The assessment review also begins the plan for change. “If we just ended an assessment with a list of what’s working for a plant and what’s not,” explains Kelsey, “we would be leaving without doing the most important part. As a practitioner, I use the assessment as a tool to help identify key areas for improvement and then help the plant leaders start thinking about how to successfully make positive changes. Otherwise, they can be left feeling overwhelmed by the number of necessary improvements or by not knowing where to start.”

GOING AFTER POWERFUL IMPROVEMENTS

In this plant — as in many F&B facilities — Kelsey started with an employee-driven safety-steering committee. The engagement involves teaching methods used by Milliken & Company, including how to use data and zero-loss analysis techniques to eliminate safety problems. The Performance Solution safety program focuses the plant on nine “safety immutables”:

- Leadership commitment and communication
- Measurements and reviews
- Organization structure

- Reporting
- Standardization
- Time and monetary commitment
- Education
- Care management
- Awareness activities

Although the engagement is being driven by safety concerns, other pillars of MPS will be applied as plant-floor changes begin, such as 5S, continuous skills development, and focused improvement. Staff also will become acquainted with other MPS pillars (e.g., daily team maintenance, quality management).

“We use a lot of the DMAIC process [define, measure, analyze, improve, control],” says Kelsey. “We deploy problem-solving tools, root-cause analysis, and similar techniques to help them determine what’s going on and how to fix it.” A key objective with this client and others is to help them eliminate what Kelsey calls “zombie problems — troublesome issues that you think you killed, but that keep staggering back to life. We teach clients how to kill them for good.”

FUTURE SUCCESS

Master planning at the corporate level with Performance Solutions helped to develop a companywide vision for improvement, and established specific targets for its poultry facilities. This effort also identified the kickoff plant (i.e.,

where Kelsey conducted the assessment). Alignment on these objectives at the plant level occurs via a “boot camp” at the facility.

During this day-and-a-half session, Kelsey

leads managers through an intense safety education that addresses the nine safety immutables in detail. Performance Solution practitioners also require managers to “rate” where they are in the safety maturity process.

After the boot camp, managers identify, recruit, and empower production associates for an employee steering team, coached by management sponsors (two leaders selected by the steering team). Kelsey then returns four weeks after boot camp to train the steering team — and its management coaches. “The sponsors can’t lead the process or the steering team,” says Kelsey. “They serve as mentors and act as resources, such as advising about meeting dynamics or corporate policies.”

The team then sets its own safety targets in alignment with corporate objectives, but Kelsey encourages them to include a specific improvement: a 50 percent reduction in OSHA recordable injuries in the first year. Just as important, he helps the team determine and achieve safety

goals that serve as leading indicators (rather than lagging indicators), such as audit results and employee attendance, morale, and participation in safety initiatives.

The kickoff plant has already seen signs of improvement, including:

- 100 percent participation of all plant employees (both managers and hourly) in a safety subcommittee
- 63 percent reduction in hand injuries in one month
- Four “One Point Lessons” on safety audits created and posted by hourly employees

“Some people still put production and quality above safety,” says Kelsey. “But until you put a safety foundation in, and

prove that you care for your people, nothing will improve in your plant. Safety is foundational because it proves to our people that we care about them, and that we care for their lives.”

“When people aren’t worried about getting hurt, they’re free to think about other parts of their jobs,” adds Kelsey. “They can think about improving quality, or how to improve machine performance. In many instances, if we eliminate minor machine stops and breakdowns, we improve safety — which also improves efficiency, because we have improved the machine. A lot of injuries happen because people are doing something nonstandard. And breakdowns and minor stops are, by definition, nonstandard. So by improving safety, we also improve productivity and quality.”

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