

Management Commitment and Buy-in Key to a Successful Implementation at Flowerwood Nursery



Flowerwood Supermarket

Lean flow has been implemented successfully in many industries throughout the world including the Green Industry. What makes an implementation successful? The methodology that is used in the different implementations is the same - math based. So why are some implementations more successful than others? The key is management commitment and buy-in. Flowerwood Nursery in Loxley,

Alabama is a prime example of what commitment and buy-in can achieve. Back in January of 2011, Ellis Ollinger (CEO) and Todd Carnley (Sales Manager) met Gary Cortés at a grower conference in Homestead, Florida. Flowerwood was going through a tough transition just having lost most of their seasoned labor force to the new immigration law passed in Alabama in September of 2011. The new workforce wasn't as skilled or as motivated as their prior workforce. This was a serious issue for Flowerwood: productivity was at least 50% lower, and to top it off the housing market collapse was affecting sales. "We had a 'C' system with 'A' employees. This is no way to grow as a business," says Ellis Ollinger. Ellis and Todd knew that they had to do something to turn things around at Flowerwood. They couldn't do much to turn the

housing market around, but they could do something about improving productivity.

During their conference in Homestead they talked to other FlowVision customers who had successfully implemented Lean Flow. They knew that it was something they should consider doing.

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A year later Todd Carnley met Gary Cortés at another grower conference in San Diego. One of the topics in the conference was Lean Flow. Two of FlowVision's customers presented their experience with Lean Flow. Todd knew it was time to do something. After the conference Todd contacted FlowVision to come out to Loxley and do a 2-Day Business Assessment. In the winter of 2012, FlowVision went out to Loxley and conducted the assessment. After detailing the potential benefits that could be achieved Flowerwood contracted FlowVision to help them on their "*Lean Flow Journey*".

Flowerwood kicked off the implementation with a 2-Day Lean Flow Workshop for the Green Industry. They had employees from all of the different departments in the company as well as all of their facilities. Flowerwood's owner Greg Smith also attended the workshop. Greg knew that this was the right move for the company and wanted to make sure that everyone understood that it was a critical step in the company's future. To prove his commitment to Lean Flow he wrote on his name tag "***It won't work here.***" He did this to tell his employees that if they truly believe it won't work here then it wouldn't. This was the first step in seeing the commitment level of the company. After the workshop Flowerwood began the Lean Flow Journey by implementing in the shipping area, where most of their labor was, and where they could gain the most efficiency. The implementation focused on all of the processes from sales order generation, tag pulling to pulling product from their 400 acre nursery, cleaning, tagging, labeling and loading trucks. Just as in all the implementations FlowVision does the "*holistic approach*" was used.

As part of the implementation the Flowerwood team decided that it was time to change the vehicles that were used to pull products at the Nursery. Working with the FlowVision team and Flowerwood's maintenance manager, Joe Foley, they worked on several different design concepts. One of the final designs that Joe and his team designed and fabricated was a trailer to bring product up on cannon carts to the shipping area. It allowed them to have cannon carts out in the fields (usually not the best place to have cannon carts since they don't move well on dirt roads). The trailer holds 8 cannon carts, much more product than their old carts.

Once the cannon carts were brought up to the shipping area, they felt that it would be easier for their people to move the carts into the supermarket location (FlowVision's methodology for shipping) if they had a cart/tugger of some sort. Again Joe and his team designed a tugger out of a zero turn radius lawn mower. Joe



Flowerwood Field Trailer

retrofitted the new mower and now the employees moving the cannon carts do the work in a fraction of the time and with less effort. The level of commitment displayed by the maintenance department was another sign that Flowerwood's team was really devoted to making Lean Flow Successful.

Another example of the company wide commitment came from a critical department - I.T. As in the example with the maintenance team, the I.T. team was part of the initial implementation reviews. During these reviews while discussing the planning process, I.T. Manager Eric Kyser really stepped up. It was determined that a very large part of determining the mix of product per cart to be shipped was missing. Flowerwood knew what product needed to go to which customer, but how could it efficiently mix carts? To successfully be able to pick the product to a shipping cart, the picker would need some type of cart pick list. Eric determined that using Flowerwood's existing system he could not only produce this document but also use this information as a packing slip for each cart. By adding this to the cart, nearly all discrepancies were eliminated. Receiving the carts at the store was also simplified because it detailed all the items on the cart.

The examples detailed above demonstrate the commitment and buy-in from the Flowerwood team. Since the maintenance team was intimately involved in the design of the transportation equipment, I.T. involved in the planning process, and shipping involved in the physical design of the shipping dock, they all bought into the process. Getting the team involved so they can create a lean flow process that was tailored to Flowerwood made the implementation a success. The commitment from top management, Greg Smith, Ellis Ollinger, Jim Van Antwerp and Todd Carnley, was also critical to the success of this implementation.

Results of the implementation are typical of what other growers achieve. Joel Turk, Shipping Manager, stated that "*discrepancies are down 80% to 90%. "An error such as incorrect tag or plant on an order does not happen, all along the quality of the delivered product has exceeded expectations."* The reduction in Labor Hours has also been a huge benefit. Joel states, "*last year, 60 hour work weeks were the norm. Now we are hard pressed to reach 45 shipping the same amount of product. If I compare head count to last year, the entire Nursery is down a total of 10% and I never need overflow employees from other departments."*

If the redesign of the shipping department had not included the other areas, issues with Planning, Maintenance and I.T. would have occurred, and the benefits stated above would not have been achieved.

Bottom line: "The addition of the tuggers has without question reduced the supermarket manpower by 15." says Joel Turk, Shipping Manager