

Bison Gear &
Engineering Corporation



Business Outcomes

- 23 % gain in performance measures
- 31 % gain in productivity
- Competency clarification
- Employee skills development

Employee Impact

- 10 earned credential with labor market value
- 64 employees continuing education/training

Manufacturing Skills Standard Council: Certified Production Technician

- Manufacturing Technician Career and Education Pathways
- Foundation to continuing education

Performance Indicators and Productivity Improve with Training Bison Gear & Engineering Corporation

Investments in training that lead to an industry-endorsed, post-secondary skills certification produces 23 percent increase in performance indicators and 31 percent productivity gain.

Bison Gear and Engineering Corporation, celebrating its 50 year anniversary in 2010, designs and manufactures fractional horsepower electric motors, gearmotors and gear reducers used in industrial and commercial OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturers) applications worldwide. Bison Gear's sales volume has more than quadrupled in the past 20 years. As chairman of Bison, Ron Bullock has expanded the company's overall product line and established a research and development center. Specializing in custom gearmotor solutions, Bison Gear currently supplies power transmission equipment to the global marketplace and its products are used on all seven continents.

With an unwavering commitment to the manufacturing value of continuous improvement, Bison Gear has invested consistently in employee education and training founded in the understanding that "smarter people make the organization better."

Customized Training Develops Manufacturing Talent

Located just outside Chicago in St. Charles, Illinois, Bison Gear taps regional community colleges to deliver customized, contract training primarily for its technical workforce. With over 30 engineers and approximately 143 shop personnel, the training needs at Bison run a gamut from soft skills training and English as a Second Language to the more technical requirements of blueprint reading, 5S and safety. Bison partners with Elgin Community College, College of DuPage, and Waubesa Community College to provide continuing education for its workforce and regularly brings in Elgin Community College to deliver

various trainings fundamental to lean manufacturing practices.

PERSONAL STORY

Just out of high school, Monte Wade was working in a pizza place when he applied to Bison Gear. He passed the company's assessment of applied math, and was hired on the paint line in 2004. In the years since, he has moved up in both responsibility and income. Encouraged by his parents and grandparents to go to college, Monte "just pushed it off." Now, newly wed and a home owner, he has committed to continuing his education with the encouragement of his wife and employer. Monte is taking Bison Gear up on its policy to pay all expenses for employees seeking the MSSC Certified Production Technician certification.

He has passed two of the four courses, earning a \$100 bonus with each. Using the tuition assistance program at Bison, he is also completing courses at College of DuPage (IL). While building motors on the line, Monte determined to become the person creating the blueprints from which he worked. The Bison Gear education support policies are empowering his commitment.

Credential Clarifies Competencies

Working in alignment with the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM)-Endorsed Skills Certification System, Bison Gear prefers to hire new, entry-level workers

About Corporate Voices

Corporate Voices is the leading national business membership organization representing the private sector on public and corporate policy issues involving working families. A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, we improve the lives of working families by developing and advancing innovative policies that reflect collaboration among the private sector, government and other stakeholders.

Washington, DC 20036

Phone: 202-467-8130

Fax: 202-467-8140

Blog: corporatevoices.wordpress.com

Twitter: @corporatevoices

www.corporatevoices.org

Find Out More

Corporate Voices is committed to identifying and spotlighting businesses supporting postsecondary completion while making significant contributions to internal company goals. “Best practice” talent development models that increase access to career opportunities through education and training are being examined for characteristics that are transferable and replicable to other employers. This research is being conducted with the guidance of the Corporate Voices Learn and Earn Business Leadership Team consisting of business executives leading promising models and those interested in peer-to-peer learning. If you are interested in joining, contact Peggy Walton at pwalton@corporatevoices.org. Team members include:

- Expeditors
- UPS
- Northrop Grumman
- KPMG
- CVS Caremark
- AOL

who have earned the ACT National Career Readiness Credential (NCRC) because the credential gives the company a clear picture of the applicant’s work readiness. The NCRC is a three-part foundational skill assessment in: 1) Reading for Information; 2) Applied Mathematics; and 3) Locating Information. At a minimum, the company requires applicants to pass the Applied Math portion of the NCRC as a pre-employment qualifier. Applicants are encouraged to go to regional community colleges that offer WorkKeys® to improve skills in order to pass the NCRC.

The next step in the certification system is the Manufacturing Skills Standard Council (MSSC) Certified Production Technician (CPT) certification. Bison Gear has long had a policy of supporting continuing education and training, offering its employees up to \$7,500 assistance for tuition and books for studies that align with company business objectives. However, in December 2008, they ramped up a program encouraging shop employees to complete the MSSC CPT certification. Bison pays 100 percent of the cost for on-line studies and examinations for the CPT. Employees execute on their own time and Bison pays a \$100 bonus when they earn each certificate of the 4-part certification. Sixty-four employees are participating in the MSSC training; 10 have completed and received the MSSC certification to date.

Production and Performance Measures Stabilize and Trend Upward

To determine return on investment in the training program, management has tracked two key performance measures to the MSSC launch—productivity and the “Bison Pride” rating—a compilation three of metrics that management has determined is key in measuring great performance for its customers: on-time shipment rate; how often the company says yes to customers requested delivery date; and, in-field warranty return rate to assess product reliability.

The “Pride rating” was trending down from 1/08 to the point of the MSSC training launch in 12/08. It quickly bumped from 62% to 90% by 02/09 and has currently level off at a consistent 85% , a gain of 23%. Productivity increased by 31% from launch to the current level. The productivity response to training has been a “lagging” indicator, but is showing signs of continuing upward movement. Given that other factors impact these numbers, it is clear that the training intervention is successful in stabilizing and creating an upward trend in productivity and performance indicators that were previously unpredictable and trending down, creating a significant contribution in these economic times.

“Elgin Community College is flexible and responsive to our needs, delivering cost-effective training in house on our production floor.”

— Sylvia Wetzel,
Chief Learning Officer, Bison Gears

Through the MSSC and other education and training programs, Bison Gear has established a corporate culture that values learning with over a third of its employees involved in some type of continuing education or training. Bison has 32 Greenbelts within the organization, and cultivates a Lean Six Sigma Culture, focusing on continuous improvements, by understanding the customers’ needs, analyzing business process and instituting proper measurement methods. Their average on the job training hours per employee in the last three years is 11 hours. Bison’s G.E.A.R. (Growth Education and Results) Program provides employees the opportunity to further their post secondary education. Currently taking advantage of their tuition assistance policy are six employees who are attending one of the regional community colleges to obtain an associate’s degree, while six others have moved from an associate’s to a bachelor’s degree and several engineers are pursuing master’s degrees.

For more information about Bison Gear and Engineering Corporation, visit www.bisongear.com

SECTOR: Manufacturing (engineering and design)

EMPLOYEES: 220 employees serving global market

HISTORY: over 50 years