

Great Company Gets Even Better! Shipping More, Better Cash Flow, and Less Chaos.

By Mike Touzeau

Why try something new when everything's going great?

Employees at Mound Laser and Photonics Center (MLPC), a cutting edge laser technology service company out of Kettering, Ohio, probably asked the same question when just a few months ago upper management suggested they explore a program they spotted online called the Velocity Scheduling System (VSS), based on revolutionary business principles mired in simplicity.

“We're already successful”

declared Materials Planner Danny Elsas, who witnessed tremendous growth in his ten years with a company that provides solutions in laser-based microfabrication for medical, automotive, microelectronics and defense industries, among others. Bringing national attention to Dayton for its innovation in photonics and laser technology, MLPC went from 3 employees in 2001 to over 50 today.

They nevertheless refused to sit on their own successes and plunged ahead, although willing to dip only *one* cautious toe into the flow of Dr. Lisa Lang's revolutionary VSS model.

Elsas echoed his colleagues with a blunt

“Why in the hell should we do that?”

when Dr. Lisa suggested they cut their work in process (WIP) by 50 percent, pretty controversial advice for seasoned business people trained to keep everybody busy, i.e., “be “efficient.” They agreed to try 15 percent and then “track it.”

“Well, that really opened our eyes,” he remembers. Bringing along an independent operational

consultant to monitor the changes, they first installed the Velocity Board, then took it down to revise, then put it back up, ultimately cutting their WIP by more than half.

“With VSS and the Velocity Board, issues were much more easily mitigated,” Elsas stated, “The visualization of jobs has been huge for us. In two months we went from this doesn't make sense to”:

“Holy Cow! This really makes sense!”

Some of the things they were resisting and thought would be problems -- weren't. “We thought we would have more inspections, more paperwork, but actually the inspections go faster.”

A big part of the VSS Coaching Program is customization. Dr Lisa helps you to customize VSS for your unique shop. Elsas recalls, “We found ways to make it our own.” They developed color coded stickers, for example, to tell them where the jobs were, and checklists to make sure the jobs were entered correctly.

Issues are identified BEFORE a job is released.

Prior to VSS if there was a snag in the process, he said, “it took a half hour to find everybody and then we're down trying to fix it. Now I don't have to worry. A request gets put in for an engineer to look at it while it's on the To Be Kitted (TBK) Board, and then everybody knows all the revisions are correct before the job is released.”

That change was interestingly embraced by sales and marketing, too, he added. “If something goes wrong, they have time to contact the supplier and customer to explain or get feedback that can help solve the problem. They are much less stressed.” Once the job

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gets released to the floor, problems have already been foreseen on the TBK Board, so a snag or slowdown is unlikely, he explained. That cuts lead time, which makes current customers happier and *makes it easier to attract new ones.*

Lead-time reduced. Customers are happier.

He said his company was doing fine before VSS but, like many shops, they dealt with too many jobs, too much downtime, too much chaos. “We had such a large bucket we couldn’t get jobs out quickly. Now we can ship out more production per week and get consistent cash flow. We can control scrap, too. We have less of it because we can catch problems early.”

Shipping More! Scrap Reduced!

Once implemented, Elsas acknowledged, virtually everyone from top to bottom can clearly see what’s working and what’s not—almost from minute to minute. “It allows us to see how our products flow—and is our system working?”

Another surprising bonus surfaced unexpectedly as they began to streamline their process when the Velocity Board suddenly uncovered idle machines. Elsas explained, “If a machine didn’t have a person on it, we could see it. We knew it. It started to open our eyes to the constraint of personnel. The Velocity Board justified to management that we needed to hire more people.”

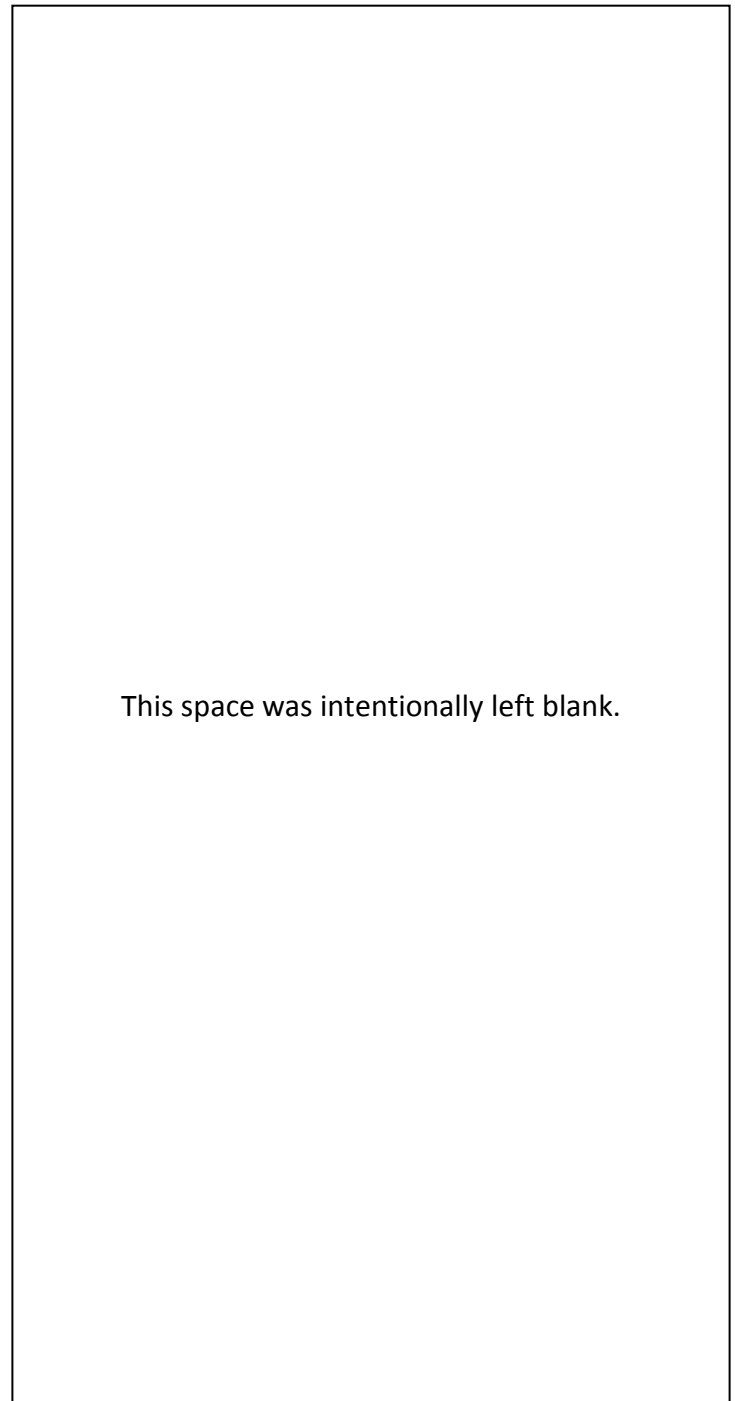
Elsas additionally suggested their ERP implementation down the road now might be a lot smoother project than they previously thought. “It’s going to allow our techs to feel like they really own something.”

More Interaction & Collaboration.

MLPC has been using Velocity Scheduling System for only about five months now (at the time of this interview), but Elsas believes it’s starting to bring

people together. Techs meet for ten minutes each morning, he said, and then 15 minute meetings for engineers. “It really opens your eyes to the constraints. You can talk about them and get it right. We’re a team, so we say let’s figure this out together. There’s definitely a lot more interaction.”

“It’s going to put value and trust into all we do, and it’s going to be easier to hire quality people who really want to work for us.”♦



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