Challenge

Bison's success is dependent upon its Lean manufacturing system being finely tuned to give customers what they need, when they need it. Hiring and retaining workers with the required skills, from production workers to engineers, is an ongoing challenge. Motivating employees to continue to build their skill sets and mentoring workers for success have become top priorities. A company goal is a 100 percent certified workforce.

Action

In 2008, Bison launched an aggressive strategy to incorporate industry certifications into its hiring processes and incumbent worker training. Bison first began offering current workers the opportunity to improve knowledge through an online curriculum developed by the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council (MSSC) and provided at the Bison Learning Center.

Four critical areas are covered: Safety, Quality Practices and Measurement, Manufacturing Processes and Production, and Maintenance Awareness. Workers are rewarded with $100 for each of four modules they pass and an additional $100 if they pass all four and earn their Certified Production Technician (CPT) credential. Workers typically spend 16-18 hours of self-study to complete each module.

In 2011, Bison started using the ACT WorkKeys assessments as a part of its hiring process. Applicants need to score at least a Level 4 (Silver) on the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) in Applied Math, Reading for Information, and Locating Information to be considered for hire.

Results

Increased Productivity: Productivity has improved by 31% since 2008. The 2011 quality level set a new standard in the history of the company.

Improved Safety and Quality: Bison credits the certification with fewer accidents, increased quality improvements, and a more self-directed, confident and engaged workforce.

Better Candidates: 100% of new hires in 2012 have achieved an NCRC prior to being hired into the Bison workforce.

Increased Morale: Return on investment can also be tracked to Bison Gear’s “Pride Rating.” Following the launch of the MSSC training, the rating bumped from 62% to 90% and has leveled off at a consistent 85%, a gain of 23%.

“Industry certifications help take the guesswork out of hiring and promoting because they provide a valid, independent evaluation of a worker’s competencies.”

—Sylvia Wetzel, Chief Learning Officer