

CI Day at Gemline, June 26th 2018

On June 26th, six members of the New England Lean Consortium were fortunate to attend the Annual CI Day at Gemline in Lawrence, MA. This is the third year in a row that I was privileged to attend CI Day at Gemline.

From the CI Day handout:

Gemline is on Trend, On Time and On Budget

“The promotional product industry’s premier supplier of bags, business accessories, gifts and writing instruments, Gemline is ranked as one of the industry’s largest suppliers by the Advertising Specialty Institute (ASI).

With a full in-house design team and with multiple product launches a year, Gemline is a leader in design innovation, bringing the most cutting-edge and relevant trends to the market. Our product line consists of totes, coolers, backpacks, padfolios, duffels, electronics and gadgets, drinkware, stationery, messenger bags, briefcases, gifts, travel bags and writing instruments, as well as high-quality brands featuring American Tourister, bobble, Brookstone, Igloo, Lynktec, Moleskine, Samsonite, Speck, Thermos and Zebra.

Gemline is headquartered in Lawrence, Massachusetts and has an office in Southern China. The company is celebrating 60 years in business in 2018 and has over 500 employees worldwide. CI Day or Continuous Improvement Day, provided an opportunity for all departments to showcase their work and accomplishments to fellow employees in the company and to selected invited guests. This year, twenty one teams displayed their continuous improvement activities.



Customer Service Table



Gourmet Expressions Table

The Gem Group invested heavily in a CII initiative (Continuous Improvement and Innovation) in 2002. They have continued to invest in developing their people, since that time. While they have received some help from outside consulting groups, most of their learning and development is provided by their internal resources.

As with many organizations that are working to create a culture of continuous improvement, Gemline's initial successes began in their Operations areas. Those early successes were visible and impactful enough to give them a peek into other possibilities. By 2010 all departments in both the Operations and Administrative areas were actively participating in continuous improvement initiatives. Today everyone in every department contributes to the company's goal of implementing an average of 50 ideas per person.



Melissa Carvalho of E. A. Dion
at the Art Dept. Table



Bob Bilodeau of Singular
Manufacturing at the Design Table

After many successes, along with many failures and well over 10,000 hours of training and development, and hundreds of thousands of dollars invested, Gemline is a much improved organization with many active and engaged associates. Gemline is an organization where everyone, every day, looks to improve their work for Gemline's customers.

One of the most important tools for idea generation is KATA. This is also called Toyota Kata, or in Gemline's case, the improvement Kata, which is a structured way to create a culture of continuous learning and improvement at all levels. It is an organization's daily habits or routines forming its "muscle memory" for continuous learning and improvements. The daily habits/routines help companies strive towards their vision, in small focused experiments.

The Improvement Kata forms the continuous improvement habits of the method. The Improvement Kata guides the learners, the teams, through a four-step process focused on learning and improving their way of working.

The purpose of the Improvement Kata is to learn more about the organization's processes and building the organization's understanding of how work works. With this understanding and ability to learn, the organization can improve their way of working, in small focused experiments.

The Improvement Kata has four stages: Understand the Direction, Grasp the Current Condition, Establish the Next Target Condition and PDCA toward the Target Condition.



Kati Kraft of Tiffany and Company
and Cindi Woodbury of Gemline



Diane Demedeiros of Hodges Badge
Company at the Art/Digital Table

Personally, I have never seen such an engaged group of employees. I stopped at several booths and was very impressed with the energy and enthusiasm of the people manning the booths. I actively listened to their stories and was very impressed with their projects and the subsequent results.

Since the program started in 2012, Gemline has implemented over 32,000 improvement ideas. This is an amazing accomplishment and is a credit to the management team for creating this culture of continuous improvement and a credit to the interest, energy, and enthusiasm of the all the employees.