

RICO/D'ADDARIO: MUSIC STARTS HERE

Not long after Joseph Rico shipped 350 kilos of reed cane from France to his nephew in America, scores of clarinets and saxophonists began to belt out happier tunes. Rico's nephew, Frank De Michele, a clarinetist with Walt Disney studios, had complained that it was difficult to find good reeds in Los Angeles in 1926. So, with the help of Rico, who later became a well-known musician in Chicago and New York, De Michele and engineer Roy J. Maier launched a reed factory in the U.S.



Rico, now the world's most popular reed, is used by star-studded orchestras, rock musicians and jazz luminaries. The company's success is the result of both creative design and the development of specialized machinery used in the production process from the harvest to the final product. D'Addario & Co., which owns Rico, has recently attained another level of excellence by making their plantations and production facilities into instruments of efficiency. The company has held training programs for the agronomists, scientists, and musicians at its state-of-the-art reed research and manufacturing center in the San Fernando Valley.



"Our goal is to be the world leader in our product," said Gary Smith, Vice President of West Coast Operations for D'Addario, which is headquartered in New York. "We are moving full steam ahead to improve efficiency and quality so we can leave the competition wondering what just hit them."

D'Addario's signature reeds are made from imported cane grown and harvested in its plantations in Argentina and France. The cane is trimmed, broken down into small pieces, and then the "splits" or sections are sent to Sun Valley, CA. There they are milled using equipment that measures each minute detail of a reed's cut.

In 2008, D'Addario enlisted consultants from California Manufacturing Technology Consulting® (CMTC) to teach Lean Manufacturing concepts and provide support for Kaikaku/Kaizen Continuous Improvements events. All 120 employees at the Sun Valley facility were given Lean 101 training to facilitate the flow of materials and processes for converting splits into reeds for instruments. They connected a 3-step machining process, established work cells, and developed a standard work procedure to make the production line more transparent. D'Addario also instituted the common sense practice of "single piece flow" which eliminated the production of giant batches. The argument is if a company drills the wrong hole for a bolt and makes 1,000 bolts, it's far more costly than making a single bolt and testing it for accuracy.



Happy with the results from the Sun Valley training, D'Addario leaders decided to extend this Lean program to the split production operation at its plantation in Argentina. One important part of the training was a 4-hour simulation to help employees at all levels of the operation see the positive changes possible with this new improvement method. Following the training and implementation, production levels in the splitting operation shot up by 40%. At the same time, the work-in-process inventory and production space requirements on the production floor and warehouse were both significantly reduced.

"By the end of the week, the staff in Argentina were amazed at what they had achieved," said Smith. "When they saw it happening in their own operation, they realized the incredible power of this simple improvement methodology." D'Addario believes that the improvements resulting from this program will help put them in a strong position to expand their reach into the classical music market.

John Moore, Manager of IT and Operations for D'Addario is equally enthusiastic about the company's future performance relative to the competition. "We have products now that leave them in the dust while increasing our profitability, thanks to the Lean Manufacturing program CMTC has helped us implement," he said.

For more information about D'Addario and their products, visit www.daddario.com

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*John Moore.
Manager of IT and Operations*

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