**Case Study: Chicken processing plant in the Southeastern United States**

INDUSTRY: Food Manufacturing

WORLDWIDE EMPLOYEES: 11,000

WORLDWIDE SALES: $2.7 billion

PROTEIN PROCESSING FACILITY: 250 employees

OPERATION: Running 7 days a week to meet demand

CAPACITY INCREASE: Additional 24 line hours with no new capital equipment

**Background**

Last spring we worked with a leading supplier of protein products to major chain restaurants, food service providers, and retail outlets around the world. Demand for the chicken nuggets and chicken fillets produced at the processing facility in Alabama had driven the production to 7 days a week. In order to meet demand, the facility, which had been running a traditional Monday through Friday work schedule for employees, was working Saturdays and Sundays on overtime to meet the demand. What had been a short term solution turned into the long term normal mode of operation. Over the course of the previous year, the facility had shut down for only 33 days. That meant that unless an employee took vacation or called in sick, they were only off from work 33 days out of 365 in the year.

**The Challenge**

Growth at the processing plant was great for business and, initially, employees loved making extra money with the overtime that came with the growth. But after a few months of operating everyday – with the only downtime being holidays or unplanned maintenance – employees were getting tired. In a manufacturing environment, tired employees can impact morale, health & safety, and productivity. On top of that, product demand was continuing to grow with no additional capacity available with the current schedules.

The management team wanted to change that. They were ready and open to think differently about how employees worked while still maximizing productivity. The management team challenged Coleman Consulting Group to help them implement a schedule solution that would improve work/life balance by providing time off for employees, but also by providing opportunities for the employees who want overtime to get it and for those that do not want it to avoid it. They also wanted the process to increase employee engagement, to improve retention, and to optimize their employee’s sense of ownership of the facility. Finally, the team wanted to design schedule strategies to increase current capacity safely while maintaining and even improving quality.

**The Solution**

Meeting all the challenges meant that Coleman Consulting Group had to reimagine not only the employee schedules, but also every aspect of the business starting from the raw material supply chain, sanitation, equipment limitations, and final packaged product distribution. Coleman Consulting Group facilitated discussions between the facility management team and corporate production schedulers to vet out the issues associated with implementing change. The new production strategy would allow the facility to operate up to 42 hours continuously before stopping for sanitation. Operating to this demand level meant a 33% increase in raw material supplies every other day. The equipment needed to be tested to ensure that it could consistently sustain the continuous production without breakdowns or quality issues.

From the employee perspective, the solution the workforce helped design meant that people would be added and some jobs would have to change. More workers meant that there would be a need for a great deal of training. Coleman Consulting Group worked with the supervisors to identify the training gaps and place employees with the right skills in the positions to offer the greatest coverage and flexibility in the event of foreseeable issues.

After many months of working extreme levels of overtime, employees were anxious about reducing hours as they had become accustomed to the extra money. They were also skeptical that the facility could produce at the levels being calculated with the proposed schedule – they almost did not believe they would get all the scheduled time off. Employees had to be assured that those that wanted overtime would have plenty of opportunities to work it. They also had to be assured that they would in fact get all the time off being promised. Less days commuting to work, same or more pay, more days off…that is what Coleman Consulting Group promised to deliver.

**The Results**

The new schedule gives employees a minimum of 104 – and as many as 141 – days off per year. These days off include built-in overtime that many employees requested as a way to maintain higher levels of income. And the new scheduling system gives every employee the ability to work more overtime on a volunteer basis. The new schedule was a huge success for employees. The company’s VP of HR told us: “We implemented a system that gives everyone what they want – overtime to the people who really want it and more time off for those who don’t. Everyone gets more time off and has the ability to spend more time with family. As a result, we’ve seen a decrease in turnover and have received lots of positive feedback about the new schedule.”

While it may seem that a facility would need to sacrifice production time to give employees more time off, that’s not the case at all. It’s about finding a more efficient way of scheduling the work, looking at processes, collaborating with the supply chain, and maximizing the hours in a day, week, month, and year. The new schedule allows the plant to do in six days what it used to do in seven, and provides an additional 18-24 hours of capacity for future product growth. Employees are happier, more productive and more engaged. Not only did employees get more days off, but the end result increased production capacity at the plant by as much as 20%.