

Lean Experience at Van Belle Nursery®

Dave Van Belle

Van Belle Nursery, 34825 Hallert Road, Abbotsford, British Columbia V3G 1R3 Canada
Email: dave@vanbelle.com

INTRODUCTION

Doesn't matter the size of your company, anyone can implement lean flow if they have a desire to improve their company. Lean flow is the desire to eliminate waste from all processes. Waste can take the following forms:

- Overproduction
- Waiting
- Unnecessary transport or conveyance
- Over-processing/incorrect processing/re-work
- Excess inventory
- Unnecessary movement
- Defects
- Unused employee creativity

One problem with going on a lean flow journey is that you are never “there” — there is always room for improvement.

A principle of lean flow is people empowerment — making information visible. If you have staff that will resist this, and you aren't willing to champion lean flow, it will fail.

VAN BELLE NURSERY LEAN PROJECTS

- 1) Propagation of liners
- 2) Shipping of liners
- 3) Shipping of containers
- 4) Just in time production of custom tags

In each case, we analyzed the data, made the calculations necessary to determine our ideal takt time, and then designed the layout. Generally speaking, each lean implementation has resulted in:

- Significant labor savings
- Better transparency of daily results
- Greater consistency of process
- Greater employee involvement/empowerment
- Cost savings

Using a professional such as Gary Cortés from Flowvision.com has been instrumental to our success.

PROPAGATION PROCESS

Our propagation process before lean was disjointed. For example, flats were pre-filled ahead of use. The process was also unpredictable, for example, we didn't know how many people to assign to the cutting and sticking processes. It was always a bit of a gut feel, based on a hunch, and then we just did it. We also didn't know the productivity per hour we were getting. And many companies know these numbers, but what often happens is that they don't know the waste involved in the

actual process. So, they know they are doing X/hour, but don't know that it could be increased through utilizing lean principles. In our case, we looked at the entire process from start to finish, and identified all the areas of waste. Waste is anything that doesn't contribute value to the product or process. Some are obvious, such as extra materials handling. Some forms of waste are not obvious. One example is the amount of time a given unit has to wait before being worked on. In our case, we were taking cuttings, storing them in the fridge, and then sticking the following day. The time between the cutting and sticking represents waste; in this case it was 24 h. After we identified the areas of waste, we worked to eliminate them. Using math, you can prioritize which areas to eliminate first, starting with the areas of greatest return. Our results were dramatic. We think we achieved a 30% increase in productivity. We also reduced the square feet needed to achieve this by over 66%. Additionally, we now have a very good idea of how many staff to put on the line each day, and using the flow rate boards, can tell if we are meeting our targets on an hourly basis. One further example, our cuttings are now stuck within 2 or 3 h maximum from when they were cut. This improved our rooting percentages, our cutting accuracy, and eliminated two fridges for overnight storage. As an added benefit, our people are more self-managed, making for a happier workforce. Using a qualified experienced lean instructor, such as the ones from Flowvision.com, has been very beneficial to us.