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Brian's Excellence Adventure

Belleville, Mich., February 20, 2007—The Bayloff name has long been synonymous in the stamping business with putting customers first, no matter what it takes. Sometimes that means getting our white collars a little dirty. So when General Manager Brian Bayer noted a strain in certain areas of production...well, it meant it was time for a reality check. Was the fall-off in efficiency because of man or machine? We decided to re-examine every step of our production. What's more, we decided to assign each one of our salaried front office staff extra Saturday duty on the plant floor so they could gain first-hand experience in all the phases of metal stamping and finishing. What? Give up weekends to operate a press? The alternative could have been worse—inefficiencies can lead to lost opportunities, lost customers, lost revenue and, eventually, lost employees.

Beginning in January 2007, all office personnel—including plant management, sales and account personnel and various support staff—were asked to join the effort to improve production by learning the intricacies of our processes. Each would learn by training on, and then operating, different machinery. The object was to add different perspective and to provide new solutions. Of course, giving our office staff hands-on training in the plant gave them all a renewed understanding of the challenges we face in manufacturing the best quality parts cost effectively. After all, that's what Bayloff built its reputation on and what our customers rightfully demand from us.

It's been said there's no teacher like experience. In fact, to study the problem from afar with surveys, books, theories or guesswork—and without the benefit of feet on the plant floor—would be a dumb mistake. So did it work? Absolutely. After a few months and a few eye-opening revelations, we instituted a number of changes.

First we identified a root cause of some sorting problems that could be corrected at the press and, more importantly, would eliminate the cost associated with excessive hand sorting. We identified and corrected some maintenance inefficiencies at certain work cells and the weld stations that were the cause of reduced output. And we found certain unnecessary or redundant sorting operations that created cost overruns. In all, our *Working Weekends Initiative* uncovered numerous opportunities to improve our operation resulting in greater customer satisfaction and the ability to maintain costs in a rising market. But we're not done. We continue to aggressively look for new ways to improve efficiencies—after all, a few lost Saturdays is a small price to pay to keep our customers happy and our plants buzzing.

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