

On a cold (-5 degrees Fahrenheit) night at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, approximately 35 members and guests were welcomed by Steve Meyer, Chapter President and UW-GB Earth Science Professor. Steve introduced our board members, spoke briefly about membership opportunities and reminded people that our next meeting will be held jointly with the Neville Public Museum Astronomical Society, February 13, at 7:00 pm. The topic will be “Weather on Other Planets”, presented by Gary Baier. This meeting will be held at the Neville Public Museum, Main Street on the west bank of the Fox River.

He then introduced our speaker for this evening, the past president of Bay Towel and now Executive Director of Ecolution, Inc., Paul Linzmeyer to talk about,

Making Your Business More Environmentally Friendly: High Performance Strategy in Small to Midsize Enterprises

The Triple Bottom Line

Everyone recognizes the phrase, “The Bottom Line”. In order to survive, a business must earn a profit. Paul asked who knew what “The Triple Bottom Line” is. An audience member replied, Economic, Environmental and Community profits. Exactly – it is no longer enough to simply make money to ensure the survival of a business. Lean Process Management, based on Lean Manufacturing, is the idea that all possible waste must be driven out because no customer wants to pay for waste. Extending this idea to the Environment and the Community is what the Triple Bottom Line is all about.

How Are We Doing?

Paul asked us the above question, and one reply was, “Terrible – we are using resources faster that we can replenish and doing little to find alternatives to resources that cannot be replaced.” Paul then told us that, after working at some of the largest Textile and Linen Rental companies in the U. S., he came back to Green Bay to lead Bay Towel.

Bay Towel is Leading the Way in the Triple Bottom Line

The towels that bartenders use to wipe down the bar, the meat cutters' white coats, restaurant linens – Bay Towel cleans those and many other items. Each week, they do 380,000 pounds of laundry!

Bay Towel uses the least amount of energy per pound of laundry compared to all of their American competitors. The studies have not been done, but he believes this extends worldwide. Some of the ways they have done this are:

- using wastewater to preheat incoming clean water
- using fabrics that dry faster and therefore with less energy
- 15% reduction in fleet fuel costs, using GPS and other route improvements and nitrogen filled tires for less rolling resistance

Question: Why Did You Do This (And Why Should Others)?

Bay Towel, with only 185 employees, is a small company; many of their competitors have 3,000 or more employees. They are in a commodity market, which means price is often the customer's deciding factor. In order to compete, Bay had to both drive down costs and build long lasting relationships with their customers. This is the only way the business could be sustainable.

The Community aspects of their Triple Bottom Line start with their employees. A happy, healthy work force means increased productivity. A well trained work force can better take advantage of newer technologies (5% of profits were invested in training and education). Bay Towel not only provides Health Insurance, but on-the-job-site health coaching to reduce sick days. This happy, healthy employee idea extends to support of community services. Improving the community can also improve the local economy.

Question: Does this require top-down acceptance or can it grow from a grass roots effort?

Senior management must buy into the idea. Leaders who share their vision with the workers and demonstrate how improvements will benefit everyone get more suggestions for process improvements and faster implementation. Larger corporations need to follow the adage, "Think Globally, Act Locally". Management must empower local cross functional teams in every division or plant to apply the principles in a way that meets local conditions and needs.

Question: This reminds me of buying a hybrid car. The purchase is more, the maintenance is more, so it takes a long time to actually save. Is this similar?

Just as Lean Manufacturing, Six Sigma and other process improvements require a cultural shift, so does Triple Bottom Line. But the dividends can be impressive. More importantly, those who choose not to do this will fall behind those who do. That is an un-sustainable position, no matter what the short term profits are.

Question: Do customers come to you with these ideas or complain when you make these changes?

You have to work with customers before making these changes, helping them see the advantages and encouraging them to be part of the decision. Bay was the first to adopt the potentially controversial change in fabric, but it was well accepted because of this approach.

Question: So will tax breaks be required to make people change their behaviors?

We are still using 19th century accounting - 21st century accounting should include waste as a negative on the balance sheet. Global Warming is real and many large businesses are already planning ways to adapt and profit from these changes. The next administration will change policies to require facing these economic realities. People need to think of this when planning their careers.

Submitted by Brian Hulse, PCAMS Secretary