



NewLink Genetics – Setting the Stage for Sustainable Lean Practices

Background:

NewLink Genetics develops immunotherapies that unleash the innate strength of the human body to fight cancer, focusing on both immune stimulation and blocking tumor immune suppression to provide the greatest impact on patients' treatment success. NewLink has also received attention as the developer of an Ebola vaccine. NewLink employs 114 on its campus in Ames, Iowa.

Challenge:

As the young company approached the beginning phases of commercialization of its products, NewLink leadership recognized that their process needed to be fine-tuned as the company took the leap from a small research-based start-up to a large scale biotech manufacturer. As a manufacturer of biotech products, furthermore, NewLink faced unique and often challenging requirements necessary to address in order to bring products to market. Processes needed to be clear and transition smoothly between a number of departments, yet many of the employees did not often have the opportunity to work side-by-side and certain departments lacked the team dynamics to create systems that were efficient and effective.

Solution:

NewLink invited DBR workplacelean consultants in to conduct a Lean 101 class for its “manufacturing group” and “supply chain group”, two key constituent groups critical in producing and ultimately distributing their products. NewLink management considered the Lean 101 program to be an ideal team building exercise with a dual purpose of improving camaraderie between the two groups while also educating everyone about basic lean terminology to facilitate more productive and effective communication.

Results:

The introduction of Lean terminology and basic lean tools to NewLink Genetics has resulted in the continued proliferation of a lean culture. Since the class, program participants have not only utilized basic lean tools to improve efficiency within their workspaces and within their manufacturing/supply chain process, they have enthusiastically introduced other NewLink departments to lean tools as well. A few of the outcomes of this simple introduction to lean class have included:

- NewLink has conducted more than 5 “5S” events; one of the VPs in fact asked that her office be 5S'd!
- Manufacturing and Supply Chain employees have improved their processes so that the transitions are smooth and streamlined, resulting in a shorter and more accurate manufacturing cycle.
- Communication company-wide has improved as lean terminology has become more commonly used.

Thanks to the lean training, NewLink Genetics continues to find ways to streamline processes within their organization, continually achieving greater efficiency and providing better services for their customers.

“I can't say enough about how wonderful Lean 101 is as a team building exercise. Having different groups of people work side-by-side during the training program has facilitated the ease in which they now work together to produce our products. Lean 101 provided the fundamental building blocks for our processes helping us produce our products efficiently and accurately.”

– Brice Oleson, Supply Chain Manager, NewLink Genetics