



## Victoria's Vintage Woodworks Uses Value Stream Mapping to Focus Their Lean Improvement Efforts



In BC, heritage millwork manufacturer Vintage Woodworks ([www.vintagewoodworks.ca](http://www.vintagewoodworks.ca)) was facing a dilemma. The company had an excellent reputation for its ability to reproduce authentic classic joinery from over 150 years ago, but it was finding that as it grew, the current manufacturing space and systems were causing inefficiencies in delivering their product to their customers. Company owner, Ken Coley-Donohue quickly discovered that getting a handle on his labour costs, and ability to quickly turn a project around was going to be key to his company's future success.

What started Ken's interest and the potential for Lean at Vintage was a tour he took part in two years ago. During a visit to a kitchen manufacturer, he saw first hand how implementing Lean principles could lead to great improvements.

"A friend told me he read the *The Goal*, by Eliyahu Goldratt and felt that he was reading about a day in my life. It took me 1 ½ years to pick it up, but when I finished reading it, I was actually inspired", says Ken.

In Victoria, real estate is expensive. Challenged by its multi-story, multi-building layout, the company knew it needed to improve but felt it was hampered by the constraint of its layout. Says Ken, "Vintage has always had a culture of improvement but had lacked a true plan or structure. I believe we have made decisions on improvement in the past that haven't had the depth of understanding of our true goal, and as a result, have not got the return on investment that we were hoping for".

Attending a workshop that included a Lego exercise helped to get the true idea of Lean across. With better clarity on the basics of one piece flow and the Lean concepts, an in-house training session on 5S (Sort, Set in order, Shine, Standardize, Sustain) and the seven deadly wastes was organized for the staff. "The 5S was a great starting point for Vintage as we needed to clean house and create some standards", says Coley-Donohue.

After seeing the success from their 5S activities, the next step was to get training on Value Stream Mapping (VSM) to help them map out their process and make improvements to the flow of their products. VSM is a Lean manufacturing technique used to analyze the flow of materials and information currently required to bring a product or service to a consumer.

“We saw immediate payback after we finished the VSM exercise. With one of our products, we were able to reduce the number of processes from 18 to 7. This was a huge savings in the production”, commented Ken. “Because we have been looking at our products in depth with VSM, it helped us improve our consistency and our quality”.

Without buy-in of the staff, many of the Lean concepts won't work. “Initially, I didn't understand how Lean could be good for our staff”, says Ken. “After all, if you can do more production with less staff, how would your employees feel? People tend to think that if you look at efficiency in production it means jobs are on the line”.

Vintage began by making small changes that let the staff experience the improvements. For example, convincing the moulder operator that he was going to save money by doing lots of shorter runs rather than setting up once and doing bigger runs was difficult at first.

However, after witnessing that the machines were not tied up and the set ups were happening three times faster, employees began coming around. Says Ken, “with less inventory we did not have our cash tied up and it kept what inventory we did have clean and fresh”. “Reduced work in progress cleared the floor, kept the staff focused and reduced the possibility of damage to the products as they made their way through the shop”.

The next steps for Vintage Woodworks include creating the framework so that its staff can sustain the Lean improvements they have already done, and getting ready for further Lean implementation.

Adds Ken, “I have been really lucky to have an Operations Manager in our company that truly believes in the Lean journey. Working together, our staff is looking forward to future changes and the benefits it will result for them”. “We anticipate it will take Vintage some time before we meet our goals, however each step we take we should realize an improvement on our productivity”.

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