

MANUFACTURING MANAGEMENT

Incorporating Works Management

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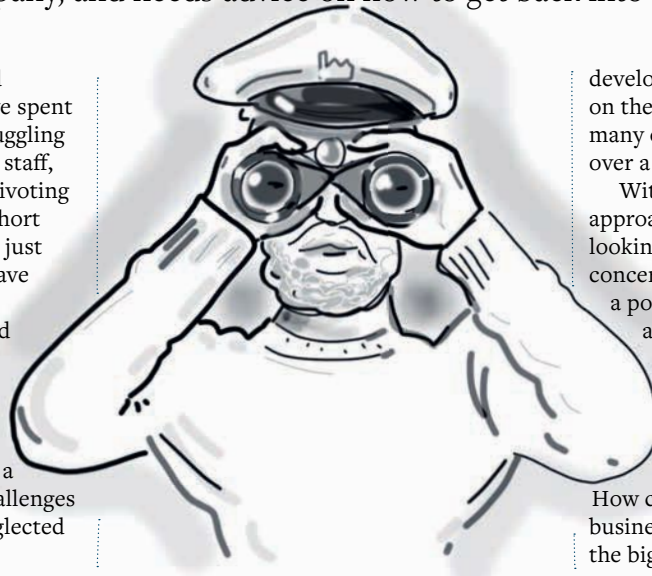
CI Dilemma

Steadying the ship

The stresses of the pandemic have led one manufacturing boss to feel like they have lost control of their company, and needs advice on how to get back into calmer waters

I'm the CEO of a medium-sized manufacturer. Like many, we've spent the last year or so frantically juggling on-site social distancing, isolating staff, Brexit-based supplier issues and pivoting to produce medical supplies in a short space of time. It feels like we have just been running on adrenaline and have had no time to come up for air.

As the problems have continued to stack up, everyone has become more stressed. As a result, we've become a business of micro-managers, where every issue, no matter how small, is dealt with by a committee. We're dealing with challenges on a day-to-day basis and have neglected any long-term planning or staff



development. This has led to tensions on the shopfloor as our exhausted staff, many of whom have worked flat-out for over a year, feel the strain.

With the summer holidays fast approaching, people are – quite rightly – looking to book time off, but we're concerned that just as we're getting to a point where we can start planning ahead, everyone will be off work and we'll be back to square one.

We know we're causing issues for ourselves, but seemingly have no way of collectively getting out of this rut. How can we regain some control on the business and start being able to look at the bigger picture once again?

CI Solution Anne Marie Kilkenny, partner, Oliver Wight

As the pandemic has caused havoc and distorted normal working practices, it has been easy for companies to forget the long-term goals of the business, instead resorting to crisis management mode.

To reset, companies must take time to work through three important processes:

1 Firebreak: Companies need to go back to basics and ask themselves what their long-term goals are. What has worked well with our clients is for the management committee to carve out some time to workshop what their key objectives are and remind themselves of the company vision. This will include reviewing whether their vision has changed as a result of the last year. If there are day to day burning issues then of course those need to be managed. However, this 'reset' creates proper space for the senior team to do some real thinking about what it is that they want the business to be and how best to achieve that.

As a rule, 80% of management time should be spent on long-term business goals, and 20% on short-term plans. This probably flipped during the pandemic but

those who have been successful in the last year have been those who did what was needed to steady the ship, but then quickly reverted to this rule.

2 Communication: Many companies have become stuck in micro-management mode, which compresses the company and means no-one feels able to make decisions. This in turn slows everyone down and creates even more pressure. Leaders need to rethink their priorities and be sure they are aligned, then communicate them clearly to staff. This will include looking at the decision-making process and ensuring that the Exec team is 'steering the ship as opposed to shovelling coal into the engine'. Structures should be created that empower teams to make decisions on a day-to-day basis without looking for management guidance at every turn. This can be hard, but as long as you are open with your employees, you can be clear on what issues do and don't need to be escalated.



3 Holidays: Creating capacity plans that look at the need for staff to take time off and then balancing it against the requirements of the organisation is not always easy. Some trade offs may be required. It is much easier to make these if you have created thinking time to work out the best options to balance the needs of your business, your customers and your employees. Once the leadership team has created some visibility and shared this with their employees it is easier to work on capacity planning regarding holidays.

Your employees are much more likely to be sympathetic to your concerns and the business' requirements if they understand the vision and the importance of their contribution. We have seen examples where people have collaborated creatively across teams and come up with creative ideas to manage the work to ensure everyone gets a much-needed break.

Everyone will need a rest and a break from work – including the Exec team, who risk burn-out as a result of the pandemic.

HAVE YOUR SAY: Do you agree with our expert? How can the company regain control of the tiller while also giving staff a well-earned break? Send us your views and you could appear here next month. Email: chris.beck@markallengroup.com