

Mate Precision Tooling

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Mate is a large precision tooling manufacturer of punch and die sets for CNC metal stamping machines. The facility is an impressive 250,000 square foot plant in Ramsey, MN. They have the largest number of EDM machines under one roof in North America. Mate was recognized for achievement of the Minnesota Quality Award in 2005.

Kevin Nicholson is the Vice President of Manufacturing at Mate. He is an Engineering Graduate of Notre Dame University with 25 years of engineering and operations management in manufacturing.

Kevin began the evening explaining that he came to Mate at a time when their business had dropped by a third. This was right after September 11, 2001. He felt this was a good time to completely rework the quality system at Mate. The thinking was that pursuit of the Minnesota Quality Award and the Baldrige Award would give direction to help attain the desired quality system. They published seven educational bulletins based on ISO, Six Sigma and Baldrige for the leadership team. A team was assigned to each of the seven

categories. The teams were used to form a system that would support and enable significant sales growth. Initial self assessment was based on thorough introspection and took 750 hours. The next step was applying for the MQA and took twice the time of self assessment at 1500 hours. Outside consulting was used sparingly and took 50 hours. This was a valuable step in that it identified questions not answered and wrote the application in "one voice." Goals were to change from a system focused on delivery to one focused on quality of delivered product.

The journey to Baldrige accomplished most objectives for improvement. "Good to Great" became the brand which helped place the effort in context, using Baldrige as the brains and lean as the muscle. A balanced score card was used to track improvement. Scrap fell from 3.3 to 1.1% and sales have improved to the point that capacity is straining Mate's present facilities. Kevin feels the process itself is as valuable as the award and that application every other year can be used in Mate's case as a tool for continuous improvement.