

Best Practices: Carlisle Interconnect Technologies Connects Employees to the “WHY” of Their Mission

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At 35,000 feet in the air, while clouds drift by and starlight fills the night skies, it's a testament to technology for an airline passenger to be able to recline their seat back and enjoy on-the-ground amenities, such as overhead lighting illuminating the pages of a paperback crime thriller or being able to get enthralled by an in-flight movie. Making these experiences possible is the technological wizardry of Carlisle Interconnect Technologies (CIT), one of this year's 2020 Florida Sterling Manufacturing Business Excellence Awards finalists. Founded in 1940 in Tarrytown, NY, and now headquartered in St. Augustine, Florida, CIT employs 500 people and specializes in high-performance wire and cable, including optical fiber, for commercial and military aerospace, medical technology, and industrial.

CIT has even made a move to outer space. Starting with the Apollo 11 program in the late 1960s, CIT has worked with NASA to enable space exploration with the development of cable, cable assemblies, and connectors. In 2020, NASA will use its products during its mission to Mars. CIT components will help optimize communication among NASA's Perseverance Rover, helicopter, and base command.

“We design and manufacture high-performance wire and cables for the aerospace industry, and that includes everything from commercial to military,” said Trent Schmidgall, Director of Operations for CIT's St. Augustine facility.

Using a mix of materials like nickel-plated copper, silver-plated copper, tin-plated copper, and stainless steel to make its metallic braids, CIT products go through a highly technical process of fabrication where these materials are wrapped and insulated and eventually installed into an

intricate network that makes airplanes soar and rockets launch. If you've ever been on a Boeing or Airbus plane, chances are CIT's products are present in everything from lighting the aisles to keeping the engines working to servicing the cockpit.

"CIT's products are critical to the infrastructure of the jets, planes, and helicopters made for the aerospace industry," added Schmidgall.

Best Practices – Process Improvement

Processes are critical to any company serving a technology-driven sector like the aerospace industry. CIT uses a process assessment indicator known as "Managing for Daily Improvement," or "MDI."

"When you are running a facility that employs 500 workers, and you're running 24hrs per day, you have to have a detailed way of assessing your processes and not only improving them but anticipating variables that can impact your key performance indicators," says Schmidgall.

CIT's MDI uses a set of metrics that encompasses a "cell" within each level of function at the facility. Within each cell is an assessment metric that uses the following markers of assessment: Safety (S), Quality (Q), Delivery (D), Cost (C), and Inventory (I), collectively known as SQDCI. Team members meet daily across all shifts to understand how they can positively impact the customer and the facility.

"This process lets us identify our biggest opportunities, and it drives our problem solving," says Schmidgall. "If we are successful in these metrics, then our plant is successful."

Also key to the measurement and analysis that goes into SQDCI is employee engagement. The "Power of the 500" is the foundation for making the process of MDI successful. "Our employees and their engagement is the reason this facility is successful," says Schmidgall.

How can other manufacturers glean insight from Carlise's approach? According to Schmidgall, "It's all about the 'why.'"

"Having one common strategy where the entire team understands the "why" allows us to drive continuous improvement and meet the high expectations of our customers. "You know you're successful whenever a team member who is working at either 2 p.m. or 2 a.m. understands how they can support and impact the metrics for their cell."

SMBE Awards Process

Upon learning that CIT was named a finalist in the awards process, leadership was excited to jump in and participate.

“CIT has a strong culture of striving for excellence,” says Schmidgall. “We have been named a finalist before, and we were excited to bring manufacturing leaders to the facility. They asked us a lot of questions and put us through a tough evaluation process that we saw as an opportunity to listen and improve. We have a very robust process here and believe we will do well, but given our continuous improvement culture, we always want to learn.”

CIT is viewed as being at the forefront of the manufacturing community.

“It has been a pleasure partnering with Carlisle Interconnect Technologies,” said Rob Caldwell, FloridaMakes Business Advisor, who consults with CIT. “Their forward-thinking leadership team is focused on empowering and growing their employees, technology investments, and dedication to a culture of continuous improvement in everything they do.”

For CIT, involvement in the broader manufacturing community is key to their nomination in the awards process.

“Being involved with FCMA [First Coast Manufacturers Association] has been a great partnership for us,” says Schmidgall. “It allows us to see what is going on in Northeast Florida and how other industries connect to what we are doing. It gives us a chance to exchange ideas and learn. Creating critical connections is what we do as a facility, but it’s also what we do as a member of the manufacturing community.”