

Keiper UK Limited



As the global marketplace becomes increasingly competitive, forward thinking companies are deploying business improvement techniques to give them the edge over their rivals. Keiper UK has committed itself to a programme of continual training and improvement, equipping its entire workforce with the knowledge and skills necessary to embrace the company's lean philosophy.

THE COMPANY

Keiper Recaro Group is a German company with a global presence that has specialised in providing automotive and aircraft seating systems for almost 100 years. It has a strong focus on technology, functionality, ergonomics, design and quality.

Keiper UK Limited, a subsidiary of the Keiper Recaro Group, is based in Bartley Green, Birmingham, in a 32,000 sq ft factory unit. Established in 1982, with the production plant operational from 1990, it is a second tier supplier with around 90 employees producing seating structures, backrest frames and cushion frames used in vehicles such as the Land Rover Discovery and the Honda Civic.

THE CHALLENGE

Keiper operates in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. Although the company has always had a lean mentality its management team was keen not to become complacent. The company wants to develop a lean philosophy throughout its workforce and is also aiming to become TS16949 accredited in March 2006.

Plant Director Steve Cooper said: "Like many companies, we have to appreciate that we are exposed to the global market today. Our company, Keiper Holdings, is a German company which is expanding globally. We have plants in Eastern Europe and China so we are competing in the global marketplace. Above all, Keiper UK wants to be a strong partner for the Keiper Group and a strong and competitive partner for our UK market customers.

"The challenge for us is to make sure that we achieve this not just today, tomorrow, or in 2010, but that we are still here as Keiper UK, as a competitive and a strong partner, for many years to come. We are very aware of the trends in the marketplace, and the drive for value added business, and we want to be at the forefront. That is why we have committed ourselves to an ongoing programme of training so that we equip our staff with the skills necessary to achieve these goals."

THE TRAINING

All of the staff involved in production underwent an intensive training programme supported by Skills4Auto, the Midlands spoke of the Automotive Academy. With only a limited amount of capital available for training purposes, the company welcomed the offer of support from Skills4Auto to enable employees to take advantage of the



opportunities to learn valuable business improvement techniques.

It was also felt that the programme offered a good opportunity to develop techniques that would help the company achieve its goal of TS16949 accreditation. Expectations were high. Improved quality, increased productivity, waste reduction, better motivated and a more skilled staff, and a more involved team, were all outcomes anticipated as a result of a greater commitment to training.

A tailored training programme was created and delivered, taking into account the company's busy production schedule. The flexible programme was designed to answer Keiper's individual requirements. In addition to the four mandatory modules – statutory regulations, effective team working, workplace organisation, and continuous improvement techniques – Keiper chose two additional units; problem solving and visual management.

Production Manager Pat McGowan said: "The training provided by Skills4Auto has been excellent. At very short notice Skills4Auto was able to respond very quickly and very professionally. The level of training has been first class and they provided everything, right down to pens and paper. That might seem a minor detail but it is important and helps everything flow very well."

OUTCOMES



Honda Civic mig weld final assembly cell

“We will be considering further opportunities for training because we see this as a progressive programme and we want to move on. This isn’t a short term solution, it is an ongoing commitment to training and continual improvement.”

BENEFITS TO KEIPER UK

- Lean philosophy embraced by all employees
- Improved productivity
- Reduction of waste
- Better motivated and skilled workforce
- Continuous improvement becomes a way of life

BENEFITS TO STAFF

- Improved understanding of work practices
- New skills acquired
- Increased enjoyment of work
- Greater involvement in business and decision making.

“The entire team at Keiper understands the need for a lean mentality in order to compete in the global marketplace”, said Plant Director Steve Cooper.

“We are very grateful that we have been able to deliver business improvement techniques training to all factors of the team to enable us to improve. We wanted to create awareness through our operations teams, via the business improvement technique training, so that the production team understand what we are all trying to achieve and can have input of their own.

“It is our responsibility as managers to make sure that they are able to be as efficient as they possibly can be, that they can feedback their requirements, and it helps us create a more efficient system. As a result, we can scope the production system better and the production teams can direct us better to the areas in which we can help.

“Our customer base, primarily the Land Rover team, is working with us on taking non-value added out of the business through value stream mapping activities. If, within this programme, we can make our production teams aware of what value stream mapping is and the technology we are using, they will have a better understanding.

He added: “Our staff enjoyed the training and everybody was very positive. The teams have taken the training on board and started to run with it immediately. Improvements do not happen overnight, it is an ongoing process. We have given our employees the awareness and the training, so they can employ the techniques where appropriate. As we look to the future we will look at how we can also improve our technical staff to ensure that they are moving forwards as well.

