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STORM SMART

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which are ultimately deconstructed and reused somewhere else.

The clock-building exercise isn't to make metaphorical points such as "time is running out" or "time is on our side." Instead, clocks are an arbitrary product used to demonstrate basic principles of manufacturing. They can be applied to making just about anything, says Neil Kagan, one of three teachers with the Florida Manufacturing Extension Partnership, a wing of the U.S. Department of Commerce. Mr. Kagan came to show employees how to build the clocks with a process called "Lean Manufacturing," intended to cut down on disorganization, paper work, chit chat, and any other red-tape that can slow a company's production time.

The first hour of the day, the employees were thrown to the wolves and asked to build the clocks with no instruction. Every hour, they took a break for a classroom session with three teachers from the government. Then by the end of the day, they're whipping through 100

clocks in an hour.

"In order to have production, you have to be well organized to push the product through," says Ricardo Mendez, an assistant supervisor in Storm Smart's factory, when the group broke for a pizza lunch. His co-worker, Susan, a seamstress who helps make Storm Smart's signature product, the Storm Catcher, said the process is teaching the concept of "less wasted time."

Mr. Kagan has taught the program to many other companies, such as a contact lens manufacturer and people who produce the lights on the sides of airplane's emergency slides.

"Manufacturing is manufacturing," Mr. Kagan says. "The principles can be applied anywhere."

During the one-day workshop, the employees learned concepts like a "kai-zen" event, a Japanese word "to make better." They learned how to cut down on red tape like shipping, blue prints and order taking. Mr. Kagan or other teachers will come back in the weeks to come to check up on Storm Smart's progress.

"This is culture changing," Mr. Kagan says. "You don't leave this seminar and think about work the same way." ■



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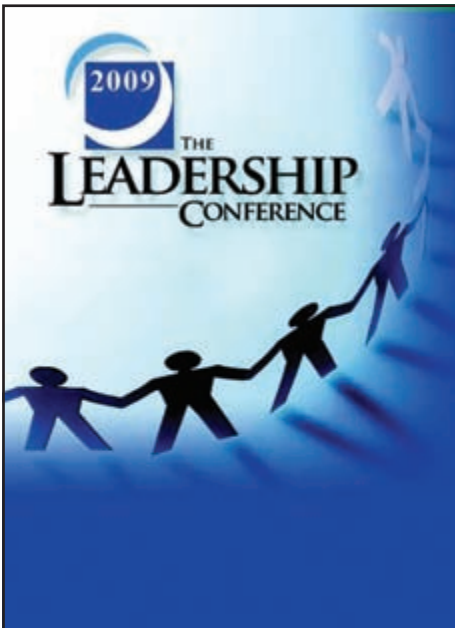
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