

THE COMPANY

Energizer—
Asheboro, North Carolina

THE CHALLENGE

Finding a system to hire skilled workers while conforming to lean manufacturing standards

THE SOLUTION

WorkKeys® skills assessment, job profiling, and training—facilitated by Randolph Community College and the Employment Security Commission

THE RESULTS

Reduced turnover, training time, and costly errors while increasing productivity

Energizer's three manufacturing facilities in Asheboro consist of an alkaline battery manufacturing facility and two packaging plants, including a metal parts stamping operation. They are Energizer's largest alkaline and packaging plants, with several hundred employees stamping and packaging millions of batteries each day.

The plants have embraced lean manufacturing principles, driving the costs out of their products by shortening the time it takes to hire and train new employees and eliminating wasteful processes and errors. Adopting lean manufacturing principles changed the nature and complexity of each job on the floor, making it more important than ever to get the right person in the right position.

"As we've embraced lean manufacturing at the plants, we realize that our future is all about doing things better than we did yesterday," said Bernadette Young, human resources manager at Energizer. "We don't have any margin for manufacturing errors or for waste in our operation processes. Our vitality depends on a workforce that is able to adapt to change and operate in a manufacturing environment that thrives on lean leadership principles. It is more imperative than ever to make sure we're hiring the best candidates in the marketplace."

Energizer approached Randolph Community College about implementing the WorkKeys system in hiring processes. Senior managers at the plant were sold on WorkKeys when they discovered that WorkKeys could lower turnover rates and employee training time. "When an employee goes into an anode room and realizes he or she can't do the job, that's eight weeks of training lost," Young said. "Our senior managers realized it was time to do something in terms of testing skills. Once they realized WorkKeys was created by ACT—a reputable organization in testing—it made it that much easier for them to buy into the system."

Implementation

Randolph profiled nine skilled positions to determine the skills needed to perform them, including entry-level general production operators, electricians, equipment mechanics, and anode room operators. In most positions, five skills were found to be most critical—Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, Locating Information, Observation, and Teamwork.

For example:

- Mix Operators must read weight information on scales, check amounts of specialized materials in tanks, and document information, such as changes in inventory. These tasks require the ability to work with workplace graphics. WorkKeys defines these as Locating Information skills.

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- Production Machine Operators—entry-level positions—must count incoming materials, determine the number of finished products, and count raw materials needed to run orders. These tasks require mathematical reasoning, critical thinking, and problem-solving techniques applied to work-related problems. WorkKeys defines these as Applied Mathematics skills.

Energizer worked with the Employment Security Commission to screen candidates and facilitate assessments for job applicants. The company pays for the assessments, supplemented with grant funding. “If you want to find the best of the best and not just make hiring decisions based on gut feelings, this is the way to go,” Young said. “We feel it’s worth the investment, and we see dividends with turnover reductions and other benefits.”

Applicants who do not receive WorkKeys scores qualifying them for hiring can take WorkKeys Skill Training, provided by Randolph Community College through the Randolph County JobLink Career Center in Asheboro.

Results

- In the first three months of hiring following the implementation of the WorkKeys system, **skills-related turnover went to zero.**
- The plant saw **significantly reduced training time among new hires.** “Once they went through the WorkKeys process, they qualified at a quicker rate,” Young said.
- The plant saw **decreased quality defects and deviations.**
- Employees in critical jobs also demonstrated **improved productivity.** “It comes to them easier, and there’s less of a learning curve,” Young said.
- The company better **adheres to the principles of lean manufacturing** through shortened training timeframes and higher-skilled employees.

Energizer accepts the National Career Readiness Certificate—a WorkKeys-powered skill credential—from job applicants. “When we hire, we typically have 1,000 applicants for 30 positions,” Young said. “If they pass the tests and get a certificate, they’re closer to getting ahead in the job application process.”

Outlook

Energizer is looking to profile more jobs, including Continuous Improvement Leaders and Quality Lab Assistants. The company has also spread the word about WorkKeys to other plants throughout the country. Three Energizer plants in Missouri and Vermont are adopting the system, while the company’s international plants are also looking into the system.

“We hold our worldwide facilities to the same level of expectation because operations at all of our plants are basically the same,” Young said. “We’re looking to expand our use of WorkKeys globally.”

