

Company: G&F Industries, Inc.

Industry: Manufacturing

Problem: G&F Industries, Inc., a custom plastic injection molding company, lost most of its warehouse and 70 percent of its molding room space in a 10-alarm blaze that lasted for two days in August of 2001. It took 150 firefighters almost 10 hours to contain the blaze, which caused an estimated \$10 million in damages.

Solution: The management team and employees pulled together to get their company up and running again. Fourteen days later, product was being shipped to customers.

Result: By relying on teamwork and the expertise of long-term employees, the company was able to recover from what might have been a devastating fire. But, more than that, G&F Industries created a new company that is more efficient and thus better able to be competitive.

G&F Industries, Inc. Recovers and Rebuilds through Teamwork

You never know how strong your team is until disaster strikes. Ask David Argitis, general counsel and vice president of Sturbridge, Mass., G&F Industries, Inc., how important teamwork is when your company is facing the biggest crisis of its life.

In fact, Argitis, had actually been preparing his management team for disaster recovery all along. From the start, Argitis' management style has been one of empowerment and professional growth. Team members meet weekly; production meetings are held every day. Over the years, he built a solid management team that was based on one key element- trust.

His team became even more cohesive as it went through ISO9000 certification, which requires adherence to specific quality objectives, he says. The certification process requires total company commitment as you strive for the satisfaction of your customers and the continual improvement of your quality management systems. In order to maintain certification, team members must continually work together to achieve quality improvements.

Disaster Strikes

On the evening of August 13, 2001 a 10-alarm fire broke out at the company's headquarters, which housed operations and a warehouse facility. According to Argitis, the company quickly put its evacuation plan into action.

"There were 25 employees in the building at the time of the fire. No one was killed. No one was hurt. Everybody got out safely," he says.

The fire burned through the night and into the next day. But, while the fire was still burning, the company's key employees and office staff met at the offices of another local company to develop and implement a recovery program.

Roberta Chinsky Matuson

Components of the Solution

Fortunately for the company, customer molds, which are needed to make product, were damaged but not destroyed. The group knew that the molds were the key to getting the customer products out. Belfor, the restoration company brought in by G&F's insurance company, immediately started cleaning the molds. At the same time, President John G. Argitis worked with his management team to develop plans for keeping the company's manufacturing function going—and retaining customers—during recovery.

They began by contacting customers to let them know there would be little—if any—disruption to service. Then, team members formulated a plan for making good on that promise.

They went in search of other plastics molding companies in the area with excess capacity. G&F provided the staff they needed to increase their own production, while at the same time getting out the product to fill orders for their own customers. They distributed to six other facilities the orders that had been located in the now-blackened manufacturing space, with the molding manager moving from facility to facility to ensure that customer deadlines were met. Management personnel also split their time between six facilities.

"It was like running six mini companies," says David Argitis.

The company then rented warehouse space to house finished product as it came in from the six locales.

While the company was preparing product, it hired an independent consultant to oversee construction of the new facility. The consultant worked closely with teams throughout the company to design an efficient, state-of-the-art manufacturing facility. This enabled the company to rebuild as it recovered.

"People from Quality Assurance helped develop the right lab design. Truck drivers were asked the best way to enter and exit the parking lot. We realized it was their [employees'] facility, not ours. They knew better than anyone what would and wouldn't work," commented David Argitis.

Future Direction

A little more than a year after the fire, the company is healthier than ever. As they were rebuilding, the G&F team reevaluated business lines and eliminated labor-intensive projects with low profit margins, making the company more streamlined and focused. G&F's new, state-of-the-art facility stands on the same property as the old building, but—thanks to teamwork—it was rebuilt on a stronger, more competitive foundation

Resources:

www.disasterrecoveryworld.com

www.iso.ch/iso/en/aboutiso/introduction/index.html

