**Jill and her daughter’s dance class**

I was at the Biloxi plant for my week-long monthly visit. I was passing the Theta cell and saw Jill, the lead hand filling out the production-by-hour board. Since I was headed somewhere else I quickly asked Jill, “hows it going?” and she gave me the perfunctory reply “OK”. I walked a few more steps and heard a “wait a minute”, from Jill.

I make it a habit, upon each visit to a client to speak to some particular people on each visit and also to speak to some new people each time. Jill was one of those people I spoke to on each visit. And following a few of those discussions it was obvious she was both very talented and intelligent; she was fun to talk to.

Well, Jill summoned me back and I said, “OK, what’s up?”. To which she began a discussion where she told me that things were not “OK” they were actually, good—frankly “damn good”. She went on to explain that since we started the Lean Transformation things had gotten progressively better but last night she had an epiphany. She found that she had been really enjoying taking her daughter to dance class. She went on, that earlier her husband, Mike, who also worked at the plant would go home after work and as often as not, within 30 minutes some small issue would trigger a serious argument. After a hard day at work, both were on edge, emotionally spent, and the slightest issue would ignite a serious spat. Consequently, when she took her daughter to dance class, she was almost always fuming mad and could never really calm down and enjoy it. She was anxious about and not looking favorably to returning home. She went on. It seems that last night it dawned on her that she was enjoying her daughters class. When she returned home she discussed it with Mike and they also decided it had been several weeks since their last spat. They talked most of the night and early on they concluded that basically since the start of the lean transformation they each could come home with enough energy to not only enjoy each other more, but enjoy family life as well. She went on and mentioned that before the lean transformation they never knew until the very end of the shift if they might have to work OT. Now the production-by-hour boards along with the product staging area let them know if they had to change their plans for the evening or the weekend. And since production is must more stable, they hardly have to work any overtime that is not scheduled on Monday to meet the plan. Also, as a lead hand she could watch the Kanban squares and other visual cues to see if someone in the cell was having difficulty making rate or quality. If so she could intervene, often without disrupting the cell. The worst case was that she might have the worker pull out the TWI training materials as a refresher while she filled her spot in the cell. Things weren’t perfect but they were predictable and that alone reduced the stress levels significantly. Furthermore, she went on, they used to have a weekly team meeting where they uniformly heard they were producing at 85 headrests/person/shift and needed to improve…yet no one know what to do better. It was a real downer and no one looked forward to that meeting. Now after the kaizen event, they have improved the cell productivity to 240 headrests/person/shift and not only is that metric improving each week, they know this metric at the end of the shift when she enters it on the production by hour board and several people have mentioned that as a real plus

Well, Jill goes home with enough energy to enjoy her family. And as for me, I had actually forgotten where I was previously headed, was simply amazed and decided to let that discussion set in. You see if you a consultant in lean manufacturing and you especially stress the human side of lean….it just doesn’t get any better than the feedback I got from Jill that day.

When you can assist a firm to create a lean transformation and not only improve the business performance, but also the working conditions --- that is a clear win. And if the people not only perform better but can go home and have a much-improved family life…...well it just doesn’t get any better.