

MANUFACTURING SNOWFLAKES

We've long heard that no two snowflakes are exactly alike. That is statistically true, amazingly, for all snowflakes that have fallen over the entire history of our planet and it's unlikely one will double up any time soon. That conclusion is driven by probabilities and basic physics. Most of us find the snowflake claim of passive interest, but little more, because we have no reason to care about their differences.

Now consider your operational processes. Equipment may be from the same manufacturer, have the same specs, and have been received the same day. There are differences. Use water or anything that has seen water as part of its process? Naturally occurring contaminants vary over geography and time, among numerous factors. Employees? We can't begin to address how dissimilar they are. Memories? It can be hard to believe you were both actually in the same meeting.

No matter how simple or complex your business, there are variables you are unlikely to ever recognize, much less understand or control. But delivery of predictable, reliable, and repeatable results demands that you recognize, understand and control all those you can.

One by one, ask your employees "how do you know you are doing your job correctly?" If you accept the answer "because I was trained this way," by definition you also accept the knowledge, skills, and ability of the trainer to both do the job and train, the comprehension and repeatability of the trainee, the lack of relevant change in materials, environment, or other factors, and the absence of drifting of methodology

over time. Seems unlikely. Similarly, "I've been doing this job for years" may be true, but does not answer the question.

It is managements' job to ensure that the probability of knowing how an item was processed is extremely high. That's what standardized work is all about. After all, your customers are not buying snowflakes.

FULCRUM CLIENTS ARE LEADING EDGE COMPANIES

The Entrepreneurs EDGE named Fulcrum ConsultingWorks clients Valtronic Technologies, Libra Industries and Zircoa Leading Edge Companies for creating the most value for themselves and the northeast Ohio region, based on 2006 employee compensation and EBIT figures. Additional friends of Fulcrum named Leading Edge Companies include Pressco Technologies, Radix Wire Company, the Seaman Corporation, TREK Diagnostic Systems, and Tuthill Coupling Group. Congratulations to all of you.

WHAT KEEPS YOU UP AT NIGHT?

A recent Industry Week survey asked: "what is the major challenge facing the manufacturing industry today?" Most answers fell under global competition, raw material prices and lead times, access to qualified employees, attracting young professionals, inefficiencies and cost control, and industry and government regulations. Nothing surprising in that list, nor anything likely to go away soon. Guess we better figure out how to succeed despite all that, or we'll never get any sleep.