

LEAN PRINCIPLES HELP CERAMIC LIGHTING MAKER DESIGN A BRIGHTER FUTURE

COMPANY PROFILE

Felicia Hwang established Hwang Bishop Designs in 1993, with a vision for handcrafted, bespoke lighting that was made to order to the interior design community. Her early pieces were primarily wood turned but she turned to ceramics in 2007, first having outside artisans make the pieces and then learning the process herself.

Today Hwang Bishop is a designer go-to for custom ceramic table lamps, sconces, pendants and side tables. Their signature saturated pieces are sold in trade showrooms and at select home furnishings boutiques around the world. They have been featured in Architectural Digest, Elle Decor and House Beautiful, among other magazines. The company is based in Warren, RI.



SITUATION

"I didn't get into this business to learn about manufacturing efficiencies," said Hwang, a talented designer who studied at Dartmouth College and is largely self-taught. But in 2019 she recognized that was what the business needed in order to scale up.

"We had been operating as a small artisan studio and needed to bring manufacturing efficiencies to our operation. I didn't have the formal knowledge that I needed to streamline operations. We had been doing things the same way for a long time with a small number of people so there was some push back to change. We needed someone to teach us the manufacturing principles that create a scalable production model."

Hwang believes that a key to business success is "knowing what you don't know, and then finding the best people you can to help you." She was referred to Polaris MEP, Rhode Island's Manufacturing Extension Partnership Center, for help.

SOLUTION

Project Manager Nathan Bonds toured the studio with Hwang. Together they identified the paint area as the best place to start making improvements. Bonds brought a "Learn-Do" approach to the training, first teaching the team the principles of Lean Manufacturing "5S" and then guiding them in applying those principles.

Bonds started by creating a Spaghetti Diagram of the paint area flow. "A picture says a thousand words," said Bonds. Hwang and her team were motivated by that picture, which she said showed, "indisputably," that their set-up didn't make sense.

Hwang said Bonds was an active partner through each step. "He wasn't just a guy there with a notepad. He would get dirty. He would say, 'this needs to be moved' and then he'd help move it." This positive energy made it easy to get buy-in for future changes.

The Lean principles and the 5S pilot in the paint area had an immediate positive impact on the business. Polaris MEP has since collaborated with Hwang Bishop on projects ranging from a 5S of the ceramics area (including investing in right-sized kilns), creating a "Lean Office," scheduling and work instruction improvement, and consulting on layout. The founder also has taken advantage of Polaris MEP's network of third-party specialists including human resources and legal guidance.

IMPACTS



Sales Growth of roughly 30% in the first year



7 new jobs; 3 employee positions retained



Investments of \$70,000 in plant improvements and equipment



Investment of \$73,500 in new products and processes



Cost savings of \$185,000 in both direct savings and by avoiding unnecessary investments

To learn more, read the full Success Story at:

bit.ly/41uBKfR

BESPOKE LIGHTING

HWANG BISHOP



“Nathan Bonds was absolutely integral to the survival and growth of our business,” said Hwang. “Without the changes that were made as a direct result of his consulting, we would not have been able to handle the surge of business we had post-COVID in 2020.”

Felicia Hwang
Senior Executive



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