

MVO USA

Operating as a Well-Oiled Machine

By Symone C. Skrzycki

It's loud but not deafening in the machine shop at MVO USA, an Indianapolis-based manufacturer of components for automobile steering systems in industries ranging from automotive and defense to aerospace and motorsports.

Something else fills the air: laughter, solidarity and gratitude. It's instantly apparent that amid the technology and precision, relationships are the most essential element.

"That human aspect is the very most important key to making it all work," asserts Tammy Borden-Dennis, the company's vivacious president and CEO. "You can have every process. You can have every sophisticated hardware system, but if you don't have people working together and engaged and communicating, none of it will work."

Machine shop supervisor Dan Crafton, busy marking parts for a military application, pauses to share his take.

"We do a lot of motorsports and military stuff, and production prototypes as well," he reveals, noting that he's been with MVO USA for 18 years.

Reflecting on how the company has changed during that time, Crafton observes,

"We've had some (internal) relationships that probably weren't perfect, so we started doing a hiring trend toward team players and people that get along well together. You need to have the skill set, but we've added that (human aspect) to the requirements. That's made a huge difference."

More about MVO USA:

- Founded: 1985 (in Michigan). Moved to Indianapolis: 1994. Set up shop at its current Indianapolis location: 1999
- 50,000-square-foot headquarters houses two facilities: One is focused on engineering development and precision machining; the other revolves around high-volume automotive production
- Processes one rack blank every three seconds; produced 1.5 million in 2015
- Sole supplier of the steering system for the Deutsche Tourenwagen Masters (DTM) racing series. Also supplies technology to Formula One racing, IndyCar Series, FIA World Rally Championship and more.

In the driver's seat

Borden-Dennis launched her career at MVO USA in 1997 as an administrative assistant. She subsequently tackled positions in areas such as human resources (a passion) before assuming her current role in August 2013.

She's quick to point out that MVO USA's victories – on and off the track – are a testament to its 17 employees.

"We wouldn't be able to accomplish what we do without their skills and knowledge," Borden-Dennis stresses. "We (members of the leadership team) make the decisions of where we want to go, but they're the ones who are really putting it into action. They know I'm going to listen to them. If they have a different opinion, we can talk and decide, 'What's the best path?' Sometimes it might be mine, but sometimes it's theirs as well."

Marie Christian, finance and administration manager, appreciates the hands-off philosophy. "We're not a micromanaged environment," she remarks. "We're kind of left to get on with our work."

David Nguyen, a 30-year veteran, seconds that.

"The company gives us ownership in what we do and we're proud of that because when you have the ownership, that means you have to take care of everything," he emphasizes. "It's not the company's products – it's your products."

He adds a heartfelt sentiment that clearly touches Borden-Dennis: "We're not a team; we're a family."

Borden-Dennis sheds light on working in a predominantly male industry (females comprise just 17% of the workforce at MVO USA).

"It was challenging early in my career here, but since I've been put in this position, I've gotten nothing but respect from the staff," she notes. "I think it's just a mirror of what's been given to them."



Production team lead Bill Campbell basks in the glory of victory after winning a pumpkin-carving contest.

'It's a give and take'

Production team lead Bill Campbell has been with MVO USA for nearly four years. What stands out during a spirited chat are his easygoing demeanor and commitment to team members.

"It's the first time I've ever worked for a company where I feel cared about," he expresses. "Not just upper management, but the rest of the people in the shop – everybody takes a lot of value in the people they work with."

In conveying his leadership style, Campbell imparts that "it's a give and take" focused on "keeping the morale up, having fun with it and not being too stressful."

The high-volume manufacturing facility has experienced 100% on-time delivery for more than a year, and no quality concerns from customers over the past 12 months.

"That's a real testament to his (Campbell's) management," a beaming Borden-Dennis affirms.

Chocolate and chuckles

Watch out! Hershey's kisses are on the loose.

Employees faced a daunting, but "sweet" challenge at the 2015 staff holiday gathering: unwrapping as many candy kisses as possible within one minute ... while wearing oven mitts!

"It was so much fun!" Borden-Dennis recalls with a laugh.

"Everyone was interacting from different departments and different areas. We wanted to make sure people got to know each other."

Ugly Christmas sweaters sparkled, shimmered and stunned. Employees rolled up their sleeves for games of pool and air hockey. A piñata burst, dropping prizes of all sizes – including a gift card for a flat-screen TV.



Longtime employee Dan Crafton calls MVO USA "one big family."

Employee recognition, however, occurs year-round. And birthdays are a big deal, evidenced by colorful balloons adorning Sal Miano's workspace.

"These are our steering gears we provide to a racing series in Germany," he explains, gesturing to a current project. "We're doing a rebuild. They sent them into us for service. We inspect them, tear them apart, test them and then send them back."

What about those balloons?

"It was my birthday over the weekend, and Tammy and one of the guys from the shop came in on Sunday and (decorated). Things like that go a long way."

RESOURCE: MVO USA at www.mvousa.com



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