CASE STUDY

HOW A COMMERCIAL LAUNDRY WENT FROM THE WORST PERFORMING PLANT IN THEIR REGION TO AMONG THE TOP IN THE ENTIRE COMPANY

spindle

THE CHALLENGE

- The team spent over 30 hours a week manually collecting and reporting on efficiency numbers from around the plant.
- Management was consistently confused and frustrated with their low load completion percentage, despite reporting high efficiency numbers. This eventually led management to question the accuracy of the reports.
- The plant had the worst pounds per operator hour (PPOH) out of eight Alsco Uniform plants in region.

THE SOLUTION

- By automating the data collection around the plant, the team freed up >30 hours a week of their supervisor's time.
- Armed with reliable data, the team was able to quickly identify areas for improvement.
- By embracing the hard facts & fixing the areas around the plant that needed help, the team not only consistently ranks at the top of its region in PPOH and load completion percentage, but also the entire company.

ABOUT ALSCO UNIFORMS

Alsco Uniforms is a fifth-generation family-owned and -operated uniform company founded in 1889 and recognized by the prestigious Hohenstein Institute for having invented the uniform rental industry. Celebrating over 130 years of business, Alsco Uniforms provides uniform laundry services and other products that keep businesses clean and safe for all kinds of customers in the healthcare, automotive, industrial and hospitality industries. With more than 180 locations and 20,000 employees, Alsco Uniforms provides laundry rental services to over 355,000 customers in 14 countries, which makes Alsco Uniforms the largest uniform company in the world.

ALSCO UNIFORMS

Alsco Uniforms Atlanta consistently found themselves at the bottom of their region in terms of PPOH and production labor costs, despite the team manually reporting overall high team efficiencies.

"I remember trying to complete loads and being puzzled. I asked myself, how are we still not completing these loads? I've got 17 ironers working 9 hours a day and the efficiency numbers the supervisors were turning in were in the 90s and 100s," said Matt Chambers, the plant manager. "It just didn't make sense."

The team had four supervisors that would each spend over an hour a day collecting and inputting data into their system.

"The reported numbers showed our plant was operating near 100%, but it felt like we were closer to 65%. We even had some groups reported over 120% and after watching them operate it seemed impossible for them to hit those numbers," said George Hoyos, the plant's assistant general manager.

George mentioned the supervisors had so much on their plate, they really didn't have the time to get accurate data - making it susceptible to human error. "You need to ask yourself what the cost of gathering the data is. Not only did we spend all this time collecting it, but the data that was recorded wasn't accurate and we couldn't do anything with it," George said.

The team grew frustrated with continually having the regions lowest PPOH and knew there had to be a better way to get more accurate data on which they could act.

"Challenged to find a way to improve our PPOH metric, I knew the tool for the job. Fortunately, I previously worked with Spindle and knew it was exactly what we needed," George said.

THE INSTALLATION

Once the funds were approved, the team was scheduled to have Spindle installed in April 2020. Unfortunately, this was also when COVID ground the world to a halt. The plant went into survival mode, going from over 200 employees down to 30. "It was a tough and challenging time," George said.

Eventually, the business started to return, and the employees began coming back to work. As they came back to work the team would need to be trained on how to use Spindle. Initially, they didn't trust the Spindle numbers.

"Employees initially were challenging the accuracy of Spindle. Before Spindle, the numbers showed they were working at 100% and now they are at 70%. We would feed 200 napkins with them and show how the counts were in fact accurate. It was our old numbers that weren't correct! They eventually began embracing it," Matt said. "It helped the people who had the talent, because before they would look down the line and see team members not performing and wonder why they were working hard to make the numbers. Now, they know they'll be rewarded for their hard work."

THE SUCCESS

Asked what benefits the plant has seen since installing Spindle, George and Matt had plenty of answers.

IMPROVED BOTTOM LINE

"We went from eighth in our region to No. 1. In fact, our PPOH is now consistently among the highest in the entire company. Our completion of loads and our throughput have improved greatly as well," George said.

"In the darkest of our days, we were lucky to have our builds for tomorrow be 70% complete. Today with Spindle (Monday), we are already at 80% complete for Wednesday," Matt said.

"The ROI on the project took around 6 to 8 months from installation," George said.

The company is now back up to above 80% of their pre-COVID revenues, with just over half the labor that was previously needed.

COMPANY CULTURE

At the local facility, the company culture changed as well. "The employees want to hit their numbers. Before Spindle, I would constantly hear, 'you don't pay me for production you just pay me to show up'. I haven't heard that since installing Spindle. Anytime we're talking about the numbers, our employees wish they could do better. They ask what they can do to be better. I hadn't heard that before," Matt said.

"With Spindle, we manage the plant differently. In the past it was 'I think'. Today, if we are going to get a big account or a machine breaks down, we know what it's going to do to us and plan accordingly. We now have good data to make good decisions," George said.

SAVED TIME

"We previously had our supervisors spending over an hour a day collecting the data to report on the plant's efficiencies. Now they just have it on their phones in real-time," Matt said. This allows the supervisors to focus on acting on the data, rather than collecting it.

"We use the Facility Health Page all the time. There's a piece on there I love. It simply tells you where to go. You don't need to walk the entire plant; you immediately go to the area that's struggling. Those are items you can act on and it's easy," George said.

RIGHT SEAT ON THE BUS

Another area the plant improved was finding where employees excelled. "If someone operates at 100% hanging towels, but are only feeding napkins at 65%, why would you put them on napkins? Spindle makes it very easy to find the right seat on the bus," George said.

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