

# Jagemann Stamping's Journey to Being "Just the Best"

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Step into their new manufacturing facility, and you may think you are walking into a showroom. The floors shine and the bright lighting makes it seem like day, even in the middle of the night. But this isn't a showroom; this is a stamping and machining plant with processes not particularly well-known for their cleanliness. The state-of-the-art facility, completed in 2000, is home to Jagemann Stamping, a full service stamping company, recognized worldwide as a leading manufacturer of deep drawn metal stampings. And, according to Thomas Jagemann, President and CEO of Jagemann Stamping, and grandson of the founder, "After five years of being in the new building, there is nothing major we would change." That's a tribute to their founder, William Jagemann, Sr., who frequently used the adage: "Do it right, or don't do it at all." That is how the new building was built and is how most things are done at Jagemann.

Take the lighting in the new facility, for example. Thomas Jagemann knew he wanted a brightly lit plant. "We were using a lot of task lighting [at the former facility]," shares Jagemann. When presented with the lighting proposal from the architect for the new facility, Thomas Jagemann was told that it was standard manufacturing lighting. Jagemann did not have a

reference for what that would look like, until he walked into a newly built Menard's home improvement store. "It was so bright in there," says Jagemann, "I started counting fixtures. I'm surprised someone didn't come up to me [to question what I was doing]. I must have looked pretty strange, walking around staring at the ceiling and counting. We had half the number of fixtures in our plan. That was way too dark! So, we doubled the number of lights." Now, with the overhead lighting significantly brighter, it has all but eliminated the need for the individual task lighting that cluttered the machines. But the lighting arrangement was never meant to replace natural light. Jagemann understands that natural light can improve mood, enhance morale, and lower fatigue. In fact, according to Jagemann, "There is no place in the facility you can stand, and not see out—nowhere."

All this bother about lighting, is all about making employees feel good about coming to work, which is what Jagemann's "Just the Best" vision, in relationship to their people, is all about. Jagemann explains, "We want to be recognized by employees and the community as having good work conditions, competitive wages—as being "Just the Best" employer in the community. The biggest thing is how you treat people. We are all in this together. I like to think we act with that in mind."

They do, and they have been since before it became well-known as a valuable business practice. For example, Jagemann has been sharing all their financial information with employees for 20 years. "You have to share the numbers to get buy-in," explains Jagemann. Which is why Jagemann personally meets with each shift monthly to share the company's most recent financial information. "I tell them, here are sales; here is our profit. I explain why it was a good month, or why it was a bad month, so they know. Maybe it was a bad month [because of] scrap; now, if the scrap numbers start going up, they are more interested in fixing [the problem]." Sharing this information in a timely manner also helps employees feel more in control of their quarterly bonus, which is directly tied to the company's performance.

Everyone at Jagemann is eligible for the quarterly bonus; it is not reserved only for salaried employees, or only for top management executives. The same goes for parking spaces. There is only one assigned parking space at Jagemann: Employee of the Month. "We try not to differentiate between management and salaried. Everyone is treated the same as anybody else here. If I come in late on rainy day, I'll be running in from the back of the (parking) lot." The same mind-set is applied to work and projects being done in the plant. Take a recent Kaizen event, for example. Jagemann took on the reduction of set-up time on two presses. Of

course, the employees who work in the area were involved, but so was top management. For two weeks, the Vice President of Manufacturing was on the floor. “Those are big, important events,” says Jagemann of the need for top management to be working directly with shop floor employees. And don’t think management is there just to tell the shop floor employees how to do it. Jagemann understands the importance of shop floor employees’ input. “If we can use their ideas, they will work hard to make it better. If they don’t think it’s better, it won’t be better,” Jagemann shares.

For years Jagemann has been using continuous improvement ideas that have only recently become popular. “We have been doing lean manufacturing for 30 years; we just didn’t have a name for it. We have had shadow boards (a 5“S” concept) in place for years. My grandfather said, ‘A place for everything and everything in its place.’” Visitors to the plant often comment to Jagemann, “I have never seen a cleaner stamping plant.” It’s not that Jagemann has a full-time cleaning crew, either. They have simply promoted the attitude necessary to keep it clean. For instance, oil dry has never been used in the plant. “We use oil,” says Jagemann. “We just use mops and buckets instead [of oil dry]. If someone sees a leak, they get the mop and bucket to clean it up, but then they fix the leak.”

Although their history has served them well, Jagemann is open to change and growth, too. All employees from top management to shop floor, are involved when company-wide changes take place. “You hate to do ‘flavor-of-the-month’,”

cautions Jagemann of trying every new philosophy that comes along. But, he adds, “We have a very open-minded workforce.” Management’s attitude helps, too. “Employees know that if it doesn’t work, we’ll go back [to what we had before].” In the spirit of growth and change, Jagemann has recently achieved the challenging automotive quality standard ISO/TS16949 certification.

Treating employees well can have more far-reaching benefits than just employee well-being and morale. Jagemann shares a recent story where a large, Wisconsin-based company had an overseas supplier whose facility burned down. Gone was this company’s only known source for one particular item. Anxious to find an alternate supplier, the company turned to the manufacturer of the equipment used to produce the item, for leads on other companies with the same equipment and capability. As it turned out, Jagemann had the exact piece of equipment needed to make the item the overseas supplier had been producing. So, the company visited Jagemann. Both are family companies, and, Jagemann shares, “Lots of our management styles are the same. They liked the way we did business and how we treated our people.” And that, according to Jagemann, helped them forge a long-term relationship. “We went from doing nothing [for that customer] to shipping them parts.”

Being recognized as “Just the Best” by Jagemann employees and external customers is a top priority at Jagemann. Jagemann explains: “We want to be recognized as ‘Just the Best’ from the

customer standpoint. It’s not just Jagemann saying it; I want the customer to think we are ‘Just the Best’. I want customers to say ‘They are easy to do business with.’ If a customer has an issue or a problem their first thought is: call Jagemann.” To internally promote the “Just the Best” vision of customer satisfaction, Jagemann preaches responsiveness to its employees. “You have to be responsive,” says Jagemann, “you can’t always tell [customers] what they want to hear; tell them “no” if necessary, but respond. They might not be happy, but they know what’s going on.”

Whether it’s in regard to their employees or their customers, Jagemann’s strong history of “Doing it right, or not doing it at all” serves them well on their journey to “Just the Best.”