

Mel Haught: Pella's Visionary Leader

Anand Sharma, Co-founder and CEO, TBM Consulting Group



Mel Haught, who has played a leadership role at Pella since joining the company as vice president of manufacturing in 1991, and who became the company's president and CEO in 2002, is planning to retire at the end of November. Pella, a manufacturer of quality windows, patio doors, and entry door systems, is headquartered in Pella, Iowa, where the company was founded 84 years ago.

I first met Mel when he attended our Kaizen Breakthrough Experience workshop, along with Pella's CFO and vice president of engineering. He and his colleagues were so impressed with the continuous improvement process that within just a month they launched their own lean transformation with the help of TBM and with absolute commitment. Our partnership has lasted for 15 years and is still going strong. I consider Mel to be one of the top leaders in America.

Haught not only produced incredibly consistent top line, bottom line, and cash flow results for Pella, but through his visionary leadership, he involved and empowered employees at all levels of the organization. As a result Pella has over many years been consistently voted by its employees to be one of the top 100 companies to work for in America in *Fortune* magazine's survey.

Haught's commitment to lean manufacturing is probably his most important legacy at Pella. When he arrived at the company, Haught recognized that in order to grow the business Pella needed a much broader appeal. The company had done very well in its high-end niche market, but Haught realized that for the company to grow, improvements were needed. And those improvements could be brought about through lean and kaizen.

Haught became a driving force behind redefining what Pella stood for in order to respond to the market and to customer needs. He has credited the company's continuous improvement efforts with being

a vital element in its transformation from a niche-company to a one-stop shop for all of a home owner's or builder's quality window and door needs. Says TBM's Dan Sullivan, "Mel often had a grin on his face when we were doing breakthrough work. He had said to me one time, 'I love it when we are uncomfortable' His quiet demeanor and confidence gave comfort to others as we engaged in aggressive change through the years."

And he didn't stop with Pella. Haught has had a very open door policy when it comes to sharing Pella's journey with others—whether those others were companies just starting on a lean transformation or seasoned practitioners seeking to benchmark and perhaps find ways to raise the bar. Pella has been an amazing partner to TBM, willing to share its story and offer wisdom gained through its own transformation and to be a learning leader to other TBM client companies.

Today, Pella is committed to incorporating new technologies, increasing productivity, and practicing environmental stewardship, lean tenets that were largely brought to fruition under Haught's leadership. With a strong foundation in continuous improvement and an active, engaged employee base, Haught can retire knowing that the company is poised to continue to grow and innovate, and to remain the top company in its market. ■

