



A Culture Shift

By Ed Barr

P&L Specialties, a Santa Rosa-based manufacturer of winemaking equipment, received the “Green Business Certification” from the Bay Area Green Business Program on February 2, 2010. In Sonoma County, the Economic Development Board administers the program, and the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors confers the certification. Receiving the certification is actually the result of a long process—a business must make an application, go through a series of inspections conducted by various agencies, review existing baselines, make necessary corrections and improvements, and pass a final inspection. In P&L’s case, the process took about six months from start to finish. The certification is given for a three-year period, so it’ll have to be renewed in 2013.

shipping materials where practical, and we bulked our materials orders, so we receive about 30 percent less deliveries per week.

I’ve always felt very strongly about conservation and minimization of waste generation, but it wasn’t until we embarked on this green certification journey that I saw the concept’s true application to an operating business—and the value of its returns. Receiving the green business certification was much more powerful for me than I’d originally expected. I set off to achieve the certification driven by my desire to do the right thing and be a good steward, but through the process, I realized something much more important: As a small business owner, I could really make a difference...not just in my business, but for my employees and customers as well. It became something bigger

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The Bay Area Green Business Program’s charter and a list of certified businesses are available on its website (www.greenbiz.ca.gov). Coordination for P&L’s certification was provided by Mara Hochman, part of Ben Stone’s team at the Sonoma County Economic Development Board (EDB). I give the EDB tremendous credit for resolving issues, providing resources and shepherding the process. It’s been excellent to work with and added so much to the experience—providing a list of green janitorial supplies with supplier information; resources for green landscaping products and processes; placards for restroom mirrors regarding water conservation; advice on selecting industrial cleaning products; and information regarding collection and disposal of certain materials.

Receiving this certification was a real accomplishment for the P&L Specialties team. Each employee participated in making the necessary adjustments and changes and was involved in the implementation of solutions. P&L Specialties produces machinery primarily focused on the grape reception end of the winemaking process. As such, it has a fabrication facility where it builds conveyors and many other processing machines. It’s true manufacturing in the sense of cutting, forming and welding stainless steel into functional machines. P&L is fortunate to have a production manager, Jeff Sommers, who, like me, is from the airline maintenance industry. We both managed maintenance teams for major airlines, so we’re used to excellence in craftsmanship and a very clean and organized shop environment.

The shop was an excellent starting point to build toward this certification, but it was only the beginning. We use high-efficiency electronics and electrical components in our products to give our customers an energy leg-up. Our industrial, picking-bin washing machines recycle washwater to reduce wastewater generation and conserve freshwater use. Our raw materials, such as aluminum and stainless steel, are made from recycled content, and we recycle all our fabrication drops (the pieces leftover from the building process). We put recycling containers in every office and purchased a drinking water purifier to eliminate the use of bottled water. We asked our vendors to conserve on packing and

than my simple vision, and it’s developed into a culture shift.

The lessons I’ve taken from this experience have been very powerful. I think there are many people out there just like me; hundreds upon thousands of small business owners who could begin to make a difference in the way businesses affect the environment. I’m not an environmentalist in the traditional sense—in fact, I couldn’t even tell you how much energy is saved from recycling a bottle or a can, or how much is saved from using 35 percent post-consumer waste office paper—but that’s the beautiful part. The only thing that matters is the end result.

On a more practical note, the process did turn up some surprises. For example, we stopped using paper plates and cups in our break room. It seemed reasonable enough at the time—someone pointed out we had a dishwasher and we could use it rather than fill the garbage with paper, which then goes to the landfill. Additionally, when the EDB provided a list of safer cleaning products, my janitorial service workers were thrilled that we wanted to use safer products. We also installed a rain gauge into our sprinkler system to conserve water and asked the gardener not to spray chemicals—simple but effective stuff.

The public response toward this certification has been very positive. Recently, I received a phone call from the vice president of a local winery—he told me he saw our certification, let me know he appreciated our efforts and revealed his winery was also completing the green business process. I’ve had several emails congratulating us on the direction P&L has chosen. In the end, this certification process—and all the excellent suggestions that stemmed from it—have added up to far more than the sum of its parts and started a journey for all involved that moves P&L Specialties closer to being truly green.

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