

Progressive Tool Achieves ISO Quality Certification

By Michael Meador

"It's clear to me that without ISO certification, we couldn't move forward -- we'd be dead in the water."

That's a pretty strong statement from the plant manager of a successful company that has been in business since 1956, but Patrick Crowley is adamant that Progressive Tool Company has to live up to its name in order to insure its current sales are sustained, as well as to exploit opportunities for growth.

Progressive Tool is located in Endwell, and serves the aerospace, military and commercial markets with a variety of precision CNC machining services. The company was started by Gordon and Elizabeth Markoff and is currently under the direction of their son, Ronald Markoff, president.

Following a couple of decades of providing a range of traditional machine shop services, increasing demand for computers created opportunities for the company to make non-electronic computer system components. Crowley explained that

as computing equipment grew increasingly smaller, the industry demanded ever-shrinking machined parts, so Progressive Tool began specializing in production of small parts that other companies didn't want to make.



Jeff Garrett, one of Progressive Tool's quality assurance team members, holds a lock pin display head in a forceps prior to placing it in a CNC lathe.

Crowley said that the company's competitive advantages center around providing precision workmanship and prompt service to customers who require

specialized parts in small to medium volumes, sometimes even single-piece orders. These parts are produced with 40 state-of-the-art mills and lathes, including a 5-axis machining center as well as many conventional cutting machines.

Another company strength is low employee turnover. Crowley, who has been with company since 1967, said that most employees are long-term. "These are people who have been able to evolve and expand their skills as production tolerances have tightened and the technologies we use have become more complex."

"You have to have people who have the vision to acquire the specialized equipment necessary to produce our bread and butter services -- creating tiny machined parts with ± 0.001 inch tolerances. We still do larger parts as we've done for decades, but now we do more smaller and smaller parts that are more and more precise. We've had to diversify to keep the business healthy."

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Might your company benefit from quality system improvements, or from certification to ISO or other standards? Call Jim Cunningham - 607-725-1225



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AM&T is a not-for-profit economic development organization that receives significant financial support from the New York State Foundation for Science, Technology and Innovation (NYSTAR), and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP). AM&T is a NYSTAR® designated Regional Technology Development Center for the Southern Tier and is one of nearly 50 MEPs located across the country. AM&T works directly with regional companies to increase their competitiveness and profitability.

This publication is funded in whole or in part by NYSTAR. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of NYSTAR.



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Here's How We've Been Promoting Growth & Profitability for Southern Tier Companies

- Conducted an ISO 9001:2008 audit at a company in Ithaca. Developed final audit report showing minor findings.
- Delivered workshops in Job Relations, Job Instruction and Job Methods to a company in Binghamton.
- Conducted an ISO 9001:2008 internal audit at a company in Stamford. Their mature Quality Management System continues to be fully ISO compliant. They have requested that AM&T provide internal auditing assistance in 2014.
- Provided guidance and assistance to a company prior to their bi-annual ISO 17025 Registrar assessment. The assistance involved verifying corrective actions taken to address issues noted during previous assessments. The Registrar's assessment was successful and the company has retained their certification.
- Consolidated Funding Application Grants: Worked with manufacturers in the Southern Tier who were approved for CFA Training Grants (5 companies) to understand next steps and those who were not approved (9 companies) to find ways to do important work without the CFA grant and to prepare for next funding round.
- Optics Grant: Worked with several optical companies in the Southern Tier to take advantage of Optics Grant for business improvement.
- Conducted an 8-hour Lean for Office workshop, training participants in Lean Thinking and how to apply Lean tools & concepts to support and administrative processes. The training was attended by 16 people and identified numerous potential opportunities.
- Designed and implemented a supermarket replenishment system for raw material. The simplified system will result in fewer stock-outs, less inventory, lower space requirements, improved customer on-time deliveries.
- Designed and implemented a material presentation and replenishment systems on the (2) six station final assembly lines.
- Partnered with AME to conduct a one-day event session focused on how to reduce quality defects using its 8-step method. The event was attended by 26 people.
- Conducted an ISO 9001:2008 internal audit at company in Rochester. There were no findings or opportunities for improvement. Their QMS has matured and they have instituted a culture of compliance with the requirements of the ISO standard. AM&T will continue to provide internal auditing assistance in 2014.
- Worked with an Ithaca company to review their quality management system in preparation for the initial site visit by a new customer that recently awarded a large contract to the company.

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The original motivation for the company to focus on quality management systems came from the need to meet the requirements of MIL-I-45208A, which establishes specifications that pertain to the inspection and tests necessary to substantiate product conformance to drawings, specification, and other contact requirements.

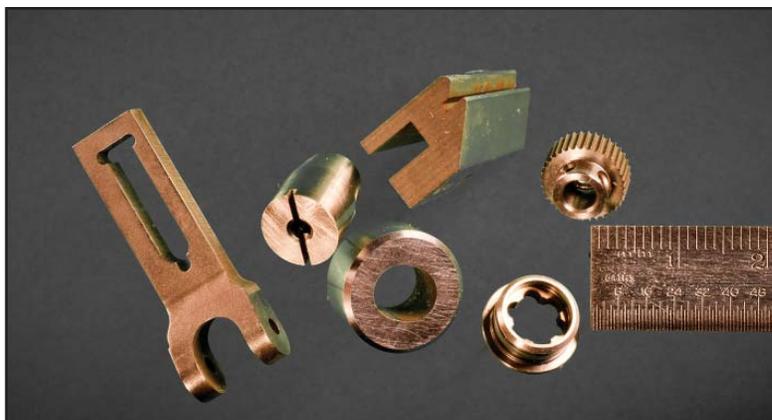
Additional quality assurance programs were established in response to requirements of an expanding customer base. Most of these larger customers would deploy their own staff for site audits in order to insure that Progressive Tool was adequately addressing each customer's unique quality requirements.

Crowley said that in recent years, those customers have been simplifying their operations by reducing or eliminating direct audits of their vendors, and also by trimming the number of vendors that are considered qualified to bid. "For example, one customer cut their list of qualified vendors from over 1,000 to 135, and then again to 85. It became apparent that having your quality system certified by a third party would be essential to remaining on those lists."

So the company's management decided to pursue AS9100 certification, which is an aerospace industry standard that is a superset of the ISO 9001:2008 requirements. Bob Mann from AM&T reviewed the company's existing quality system, assessed what else needed to be done to prepare for the certification pro-

cess, created a plan to make it happen, and provided assistance and guidance until the company was ready for audit by a third party.

This process was interrupted by the 2011 flood that filled the entire plant with water up to the



Examples of precision work at Progressive Tool. Scale at right is in millimetres on top and 64ths of an inch on the bottom.

window sills. Crowley explained that the flood recovery effort pushed the quality systems work to the back burner, but that their customers were understanding and were willing to postpone the deadlines for their QMS requirements.

Subsequently, the managers conferred with Mann and decided it was in the company's best interest to go for ISO 9001:2008 registration instead of AS9100. "It was hard for us to get started, but Ron and I made a big push, and with lots of help from Bob we made it a priority. You have to really keep after it to put the procedures in place to get certified."

Last fall, Progressive Tool passed the registration audit and achieved ISO certification. Within two days, a large customer told Crowley that he would be releasing several purchase or-

ders that had been on hold because the orders were dependent on the company becoming ISO certified.

Crowley said that one result of being an ISO 9001:2008 company is that Progressive Tool is now getting RFQs from several customers who had previously considered the company as being unqualified just due to the absence of that certification.

He explained other benefits: "Following ISO standards has helped us to reliably create documents and records that keep things from falling through the cracks.

It doesn't make us perfect, but at least now we know when something falls through the cracks we can quickly find it and fix it."

"The kind of information that we're getting from our QMS helps us be on board with the big companies; it's in line with what the big companies want to know about the work we're doing for them. Things like delivery schedule adjustments or any problems with jobs -- what they're flowing down to us and what we are pushing up to them makes more sense to everyone concerned."

In addition to following the ISO standard and the MIL-I-45208A specification, Progressive Tool meets the calibration system requirements of MIL-STD-45662, and utilizes Statistical Process Controls (SPC) and Electronic Data Interchange (EDI).

www.progressivetool.com

8 Things to Review, Refine & Refocus for Any New Year

By Deborah Shane

Yep, the end of any year is hectic, crazy and disruptive but it's also a key time to review, refine and refocus on our accomplishments, changes and how we dealt with our challenges.

Ultimately, we should look mostly at the pluses, but be honest about the minuses and how they have held you back. There are always endless positive insights and lessons to be learned from them.

I don't do resolutions as they are too rigid for me. I prefer setting my intentions, which are more fluid and allow me to decide what I would like to see happen, then set myself up and be ready for them to happen. I call it "active dreaming" which adds the "doing" to the dreaming.

I have to constantly be monitoring myself on several levels. Self appraisal with a healthy dose of honesty is a valuable tool. Developing our EQ (Emotional Quotient) is a huge asset in business success in addition to our IQ.

Our professional success is only possible if our house is in order. We need to know ourselves, change ourselves when it's called for and trust ourselves more than we sometimes do.

According to Talent Smart, 90% of high performers at the work place possess high EQ, while 80% of low performers have low EQ. Emotional Intelligence is absolutely essential in the formation, development, maintenance and enhancement of close personal relationships.

Below are eight items to review, refine and refocus that can jump start any year.

Work Life Balance

All work and no play, or too much play and not enough work, definitely impacts our happiness and success.

Trying to put into place your best balance is an effort whose value we should never underestimate.

Health and Wellness

It is ultimately your responsibility to take care of yourself. Employee wellness is a top priority now, as it can cost companies \$23 billion each year, according to the Wall Street Journal, and impacts hiring and retention.

Healthier employees make more productive workers.

People who show thoughtful initiative will be rewarded.

Relationships

Networking and making quality connections both online and in person are the most non-negotiable parts of standing out as an employee or small business owner. Focus on the pillar social media marketing tactics including LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, blogging and eMarketing and go out and meet people in person and at local and national events.

Show up, connect, engage and grow relationships daily. Find the time, make the time, invest more time and be selective.

Your New Year Business Review

Coping Skills

How are your coping skills?

All of us go through uncertainty, health issues, sudden change and other life events that we must be able to work through. What are the best coping activities and mechanisms you have in place and what do you need to do to refine them?

We can never have too many coping skills.

Skill Gaps

Career retention and job search change are ongoing. Make sure you are qualified for the jobs you want and the one you currently have. Don't fall behind, stay ahead.

Upgrade both your hard and soft skills, especially if you are in technology, healthcare, medical and professional services. Develop more likeability, be more of a team player and take more initiatives to develop leadership.

Resentments

Get rid of them, work through them, resolve them and let them go. They are not productive or good energy to hold onto.

Intentions

What do you want to see happen in your life this year? What do you need to do to make them happen?

Move yourself in the direction you want to go. Your career path is your responsibility. Set the tasks, timelines and tone, which will impact the outcome.

Optimism and Kindness

These two assets are capable of changing anything and everything and building so much good faith and good will.

Be willing to uncover everything you need to know about yourself to get your house in order, inside and out and continue to refine your who, what and why.

Big commitment – but even bigger payoff.



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Associates' Corner



RPA Electronic Solutions, Inc. is a Binghamton company that provides engineering design services as well as a variety of digital signal processing products.

RPA's president, Rick Pray, described how the company got started in 1995. "Barry (RPA's vice president of engineering) and I worked together at another company, and with the OK from our employer, we began doing some private consulting work. That ultimately led to several contracts for design projects, and that's when the company really got traction."

"Initially we had four people working long hours in the basement of my house. Much of that early work ended up in deployed systems built by several major defense contractors."

In 1998, RPA developed its first generation FIO (Flexible Input/Output) board line. This product is based on a field-programmable gate array (FPGA), which is an integrated circuit designed to be configured by a customer or a designer after manufacturing. Fifteen years later, updated versions of these boards are still in demand. The I/O products have been used in applications such as RADAR and SONAR signal processing, video camera interfaces, and sensor simulation.

The business evolved to include large scale parallel pro-

cessing, with as many as 900 processors in a single system. RPA also developed a product that synchronizes the output from multiple PC video sources. This Genlock solution is used by many customers in the flight simulation and virtual reality / gaming world.

"We had continued success and growth until the dot-com bubble burst and our customers slashed their new product work," said Pray. "At that point, we decided to return to more familiar territory, which was simulation and training technology."

That was apparently a good move because, since then, many industries have added or expanded their use of simulated environments for training. Building on their experiences, RPA staff have won a number of Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) grants that have helped fund internal R&D projects.

One example is a recent SBIR project that focuses on the development of components for wireless, real-time training environments. One use of this type of system is for military and law enforcement personnel. A dozen or more trainees can move about in simulated scenarios, "seeing" via head mounted video displays and with sensors that detect movement, weapons use, and a range of other data that supports interactivity and performance monitoring.

In 2006, Pray and Williams engaged Lloyd Johnson from AM&T to help them develop a strategic plan for the com-

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Associates' Corner

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pany. In describing the result of that process, Pray said they are using the plan on an ongoing basis, and have updated it from time to time. "Of course, we had to adapt it to changing needs of our market, but we haven't diverted much from the core plan."

Williams added, "We've used it for a lot of proposals, including material from the strategic plan to help potential customers understand the match between their needs and our core business trajectory. It helps them understand that we'll be a good long-term partner."

"Since RPA is small, winning contracts from large companies depends on their understanding our track record and trusting our capabilities and performance." As such, Pray and Williams explained that they concentrate on building successful relation-



RPA developed a man-wearable solution for wireless, high-speed, 3-D video transmission to enable untethered training with a helmet mounted display system. It can support up to HD (1080p) resolution video as well as other required sensors such as head motion tracking, simulated weapons, motion control, audio, and others.

ships with those customers, concentrating on the company mission created in 2006 as part of the AM&T strategic planning effort. "Our mission is to provide reliable hardware and software building blocks for the real-time data acquisition, test and mea-

surement, and image processing communities. We are a true partner that provides cost effective solutions through a deep understanding of customer's requirements."

www.rpaelectronics.com

Around the Southern Tier

Jan 15	Business After Hours, New Berlin - 607-334-1400
Jan 15	Business After Hours, Watkins Glen - 607-535-6243
Jan 21	After Hours Networking, Binghamton - 607-772-8860
Jan 22	Business Networking Lunch & Learn, Owego - 607-687-2020
Jan 22	Business After Hours, Corning - 607-936-4686
Jan 23	Social Media Seminar, Johnson City - 607-772-8860
Jan 23	Annual Chamber Meeting, Elmira - 607-734-5137
Jan 29	Business After Hours, Norwich - 607-334-1400
Jan 30	Annual Chamber Meeting, Ithaca - 607-273-7080
Feb 4	Economic Forecast Breakfast, Binghamton - 607-772-8860

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- Sales and Marketing
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Our integrated, comprehensive approach, applied to the whole value chain, can make a difference. We are "hands-on", roll-up-your-sleeves people and we're passionate about manufacturing.

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