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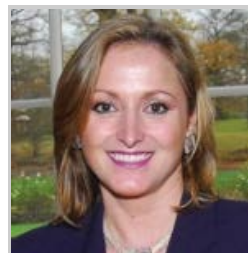
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A bit of self-help necessary

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Andrea Rodney, co-director of 28-employee subcontractor Hone-All Precision, suggests that companies should not look only to government for help in the survival stakes

In mid-2010, the Institution of Engineering Technology, partnered by Manufacturing Insight [a joint Government/EEF initiative], organised a briefing on UK manufacturing for newly elected MPs. The event was attended by 22 MPs and peers, as well as 40 business leaders; I was one of the discussion panellists.



In the UK, manufacturing accounts for 10% of total employment, contributes 13% of GDP and generates 50% of UK exports. Even so, we argued that UK manufacturing could do much better, especially if supported by a Government determined to encourage investment and innovation (see also [comment here](#); and [news item here](#)). But, irrespective of size, companies could, and should, do more to help themselves.

One of the major changes at Hone-All has been the transition from an owner-managed company to one with a clearly defined management team structure. Our culture is one of a family business, with the emphasis on approachability, teamwork, communication and co-operation, with an open policy on management and business strategy that invites the support of every individual, with employees equipped with the skills they need to take more responsibility and then be trusted to deliver.

We have also taken steps to present a strong and reassuring image to our customers – and suppliers. It is vitally important to deliver a clear and consistent message that informs the widest possible audience of a company's capabilities. It is equally important to provide the best possible service. This is why Hone-All Precision is currently working towards silver level status in the aerospace and defence industry's Supply Chains for the 21st Century initiative (SC21). We have bronze level status, but our objective now is silver level, 99.5-99.9% quality performance criteria – only achieved by five SC21 participant companies.

The above have required investment and a considerable commitment of time by everyone involved. But the benefits far outweigh the actual cost.

It is not quite so clear-cut for the biggest investment by far since the company began in 1979. This is the 2008 relocation from Dunstable to a fully-refurbished 20,000 ft² factory in Leighton Buzzard. The majority of the cost has been shouldered by Hone-All Precision, supported by £76,000 grant funding for the move and £6,000 towards training.

Completion of this project marked the culmination of a journey that began back in the late '90s, when Hone-All Precision approached Cranfield University for consultancy work that would be match-funded by government. The end result of what has been at times a very stressful and demanding experience is an environmentally-friendly factory laid out in accordance with lean manufacturing principles and with the emphasis on reducing waste.

Relocation was an integral part of a process of continual improvement that we believe is providing Hone-All Precision with the best prospect for long-term survival in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

Our route map may not suit others, but we would encourage those facing similar challenges to take stock of their situation and to begin, as we did, by making numerous small improvements, such as tidying and re-organising the workplace, and improving the exterior appearance of the factory. After all, if the first thing customers see is evidence of poor housekeeping and, by implication, poor management, their first impressions will not be what you would like them to recall when looking to place orders.

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