



Fit For Nuclear Q&A: Alderman Tooling

Karen Friendship, managing director at Alderman Tooling Ltd, explains how F4N helped drive continuous improvement across the business.

Could you introduce your company?

Alderman Tooling is a bespoke metal fabricator based in Plymouth. Founded in 1969 by Bill Alderman, it remains in family ownership and management. We offer comprehensive metalwork design and fabrication services to diverse markets (retail, IT, industrial, automotive) throughout the South West and nationally. We currently employ 48 full-time staff.

Why did you enter the F4N programme?

For Aldermans, entering F4N was as much about the journey as the destination. We first heard of the F4N programme at the end of 2015. With a newly-formed management team, we identified it as a useful process to aid and implement some of the critical improvements we were driving in the business.

We firmly believe in continuous improvement (CI) – it's a part of our business culture, and it's how we remain competitive in a market driven by lead times and prices, as well as quality.

What areas did the assessment identify for development?

The first audit and company assessment was an incredibly powerful tool, which enabled me to coach and demonstrate strategic thinking in the business and to question not only the operational improvements that were needed, but also to think

further into the future about the type of business we wanted to be.

The audit identified that our main business need was to improve our health & safety processes. We were aware of this, but gaining independent feedback provided an impetus for improvement.

How did you close the gaps in these areas?

Once our summary spider chart was formulated, we started to work on our weakest areas and assign responsibilities to the management team. This then developed into our company-wide strategy, not just a nuclear strategy. We added more actions and evolved the tasks as we progressed. The actions and outputs have now become more integrated with our shopfloor teams to gain insights from them and to aid continual feedback.

Training was key to developing our strategy. With funding assistance aided by SWMAS we were able to coach leadership attributes within our top team, provide Six Sigma training to our supervisory team, and implement new standards. We achieved OHSAS 18001:2007 health & safety accreditation and ISO 14001:2015 for environmental management in March 2017 – testament to how far we have come.



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We have a strong commitment now from all staff to health & safety, environmental and quality management, and all staff have signed a charter in support of our policies. Health and safety signage in the factory is much improved, particularly focusing on the key areas of eye and ear protection, and scalding prevention. Our accreditations ensure regular internal and external auditing takes place to maintain our high standards.

What benefits have you seen from F4N?

Mainly we have used F4N as a catalyst and motivator to keep up the management, operational and strategic improvements. We've undertaken many continuous improvement activities, each being a step on the journey. The F4N award gives a recognition of all we have worked towards and achieved so far.

Thanks to the process we have managed to gain more empowerment and employee engagement – and, satisfyingly, our outputs and profitability have improved.

Where do you see the opportunities in nuclear?

We have no experience thus far in supplying the nuclear sector, although we are well placed to supply the naval base at Devonport and the new Hinkley Point development, and now intend to target these in earnest.

How do you see your business developing in nuclear?

The F4N programme has been a powerful and valuable journey of learning for us. If we are able to achieve and win future work in a new sector, this would be the icing on the cake. Our objective is to have acquired approximately £450,000 annual turnover from the nuclear sector by 2020.

www.aldermantooling.co.uk

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