

PAUL MUELLER COMPANY CASE STUDY



COMPANY BACKGROUND

The Paul Mueller Company was established in 1940 in Springfield, Missouri. It has evolved into a diversified public entity that trades under the symbol MUEL.

The company has extensive manufacturing and engineering capabilities in the U.S., Netherlands, and Vietnam, producing stainless steel processing equipment and heat exchangers for the agricultural, food, dairy, beverage, pharmaceutical, and chemical industries.

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

In 2011, when David Moore became president of the company founded by his grandfather, the business struggled to navigate the aftermath of the Great Recession. Revenue had declined by 69% from 2007 to 2010, and the company also experienced a significant talent drain as payroll decreased by 79% during the same period. This loss of personnel led to a decline in institutional knowledge regarding the company's operations and resulted in a lack of trust between employees and management.

GREAT GAME SOLUTIONS

Moore knew that to turn the company's fortunes around, he needed to lean on the efforts of every one of his 650 team members. "I had a deep belief that we had a great group of people and that every one of them could change the trajectory of where we were headed as a company," says Moore.

The solution to getting everyone at the company to collaborate on its turnaround was to invest in the business and financial literacy of the workforce while embracing open-book transparency through the practice of the Great Game of Business. The company started holding regular huddles of various sizes, including those focused on materials, labor, and scrap, to establish a foundation for better forecasting and financial literacy.

The team also initiated a series of Minigames to address Mueller's Critical Number: delivering parts to the shop on time. These efforts yielded significant improvements in shipment timing, estimation accuracy, efficiency, and profitability. Additionally, there was clear progress in less tangible areas, such as increased morale, more constructive employee suggestions, and a broader understanding of the business than ever before.

While the company averaged \$4.8 million in domestic pretax operating losses over four years, two years after adopting the GGOB, it reported a positive \$1.9 million in operating income in 2013—a trend that continues into 2025, as the company reported earnings exceeding \$18 million for the first three quarters of 2024.

RAPID FINANCIAL RESULTS, LASTING CULTURAL CHANGE

The financial impact of participating in the GGOB was immediate, earning the company a Rookie of the Year award in 2013, and has since proven sustainable for the Paul Mueller Company. This lasting cultural change continues to drive the company's positive financial results.

"Our GGOB practice has come to define our culture," says Moore. "It's the single most visible aspect of our business. We continue to practice techniques like our huddle more reliably than going to church. We focus on creating an environment where our coworkers can continue to learn how they affect the company's performance and feel like they're winning based on the results."

As the associates grew more confident in their understanding of the business, Moore chose to reorganize the company. They transitioned from a functional organization to 11 individual business units, each managed by a leader who reports directly to the president and oversees its P&L.

"The weekly huddle forecasts, scorecard reviews, and margin discussions on whether we are winning or losing empower our coworkers to ask insightful questions about the company's financial health," says Moore.

"Before implementing the GGOB, we lacked the vocabulary to discuss these matters."

As associates gained a deeper understanding of their business, they shifted their focus from merely how they created things to how they collaborated as a team—now and in the future.

Case in point: Associates through the company worked together to create a five-year plan for their business, which Moore says emerged from improved business literacy within the organization and an understanding of which customers could grow with them.

"Long-term planning happens naturally when we share a common understanding of our business," Moore states. "Team members now take the initiative instead of waiting for directives. They understand what needs to be done to advance the business. With that knowledge, our five-year plan became clear."

The team's collective efforts at The Paul Mueller Company have paid off in another impressive way: In 2025, they were inducted into the Missouri Manufacturers Hall of Fame.

"The GGOB played a significant role in helping us earn that honor," says Moore.



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