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By HOWARD DUKES | TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

# Trim the fat

**L**arry Davis, the president of Daman Products Company Inc., said he's more likely to find business insight from a literary figure than from one of the business books that can be found on the shelves of libraries and bookstores.

That might explain why Davis used a quote from Mark Twain during a presentation outlining Daman Products' business philosophy.

Daman Products makes manifolds, valves and flanges for hydraulic systems.

"It's not what you don't know that hurts you," Twain, the 19th-century novelist, essayist and satirist said. "It's what you know that isn't true."

Davis said that eliminating incorrect beliefs about what is best for customers and the Daman Products bottom line has been a major part of the company's evolving business philosophy for the last 13 years.

That is when Daman Products embarked on the lean business model. The model's goal is self-explanatory.

"Get rid of the fat," Davis says.

However, Davis said, that is not as easy as it sounds.

"In 1997, the concept of lean thinking was presented to us and about half of what was presented to us made sense — improve our quality, reduce cost, reduce chaos," Davis said.

All of that made sense, but the philosophy also called on the firm to think in ways contrary to ways that the firm had operated in the past.

"We would build fewer parts per run and we would reduce inventory," Davis said his presentation was part of the Entrepreneurship series at Indiana

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University South Bend. Davis said the company embarked on the process because the lean process had been successful in other places, and Daman Products was struggling at the time.

“Thirteen years later, we are still evolving and perfecting (the process),” Davis said.

That meant managers and employees looked for ways to make sure the lean process fused with the Daman Products philosophy of doing the right things for the right reason and working to help the firm’s customers be successful.

Davis said that as he struggled to refine the lean philosophy so that it would work in the Daman Products culture, he made a key realization.

“We stumbled into developing a culture of continuous improvement, and the lean process is a tool to impact that culture,” Davis said.

Davis made his point by discussing a lecture that he attended with his son. The lecturer was a neurosurgeon and psychiatrist. The doctor, who worked with troubled youth, said he figured about a quarter of the youth benefited from the sessions.

“He talked to his colleagues and asked them if they felt they were helping (their patients), and they said yes,” Davis said. “But when he asked how did they know, they couldn’t answer the question.”

Davis said the doctor eventually realized that the systems in the industry developed in a way that made it convenient for the service providers rather than for the

clients.

Davis said Daman Products makes a conscious effort to make sure that the company’s activities are guided by its mission statement.

“We all know that we need to understand what helps our customers be successful,” Davis said. “And to the extent that we are successful in doing that, they will continue to come back to us and buy our products.”

Davis said that the lean philosophy is now seen as a tool to better serve the customer.

“People who do lean implementation will tell

‘New’ business model is lean, aims to add value for customer

CONTINUED ON 6

Tribune Photo | GENE KAISER

Larry Davis, president of Daman Products, speaks on operating a lean business. The lecture was part of Indiana University South Bend’s Entrepreneurship series.



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# Fresh approach to sandwiches at Dagwood's

Dagwood's Sandwich Shoppes, named for the famous refrigerator-raiding, pile-'em-high comic strip character married to Blondie, satisfies customers with fresh ingredients and lunchtime take-out.

Dustin Bowers operates three of the stores independently, in Granger, Valparaiso and Cedar Lake, since the franchise that started the chain closed.

The stores opened last year. His first store,

**LEARN MORE**  
For more information, contact Dagwood's Sandwich Shoppes, 7130 Heritage Square Drive, Suite 440, Granger; call 574-387-5206; or visit [www.dagwoods-sandwiches.com](http://www.dagwoods-sandwiches.com).

opened in early 2008 on Niles Avenue in South Bend, closed late last year in the face of a declining market because of Saint Joseph Regional Medical Center's move and broad layoffs at Madison Center.

"I buy top round,

butchered chubs of meat and we freshly slice them here along with our cheeses," Bowers says. "We have fresh produce. Everything's fresh. The ingredients come through when you take a bite. I think that brings any age group into the place."

The Granger store, open 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday, offers delivery from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. weekdays.

The service reaches west to Ironwood Road, east to Bittersweet Road, north to Adams Road and south to McKinley Avenue. Offices can order platters that feed 12 to 16 people for \$54.

Most customers choose to visit the store, which has nearly 2,000 square

feet and seats 45 to 55 people, in the Heritage Square shopping center.

"We have more dine-in than takeout," Bowers says. "It varies from day to day. We have TVs in our places. We're always showing sports or something like that. There's some entertainment aspect."

"We have the comic strip characters on the wall, the bright colors. People who don't know who Blondie is still enjoy the place."

CONTINUED FROM 5

you that 95 percent of (work) is done in nonvalue activities," Davis says.

Some of the activities that don't add value are necessary, Davis said. For example, sometimes companies have to hold meetings.

"A world-class company can get those (nonvalue) activities down to 70 percent," Davis said.

Davis said the final piece comes when managers realize that the corporate culture needs to encourage employees to take ownership in the process.

"People who are highly trained, know what they are doing and are left alone to do it and are doing it for a higher purpose, create value."




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