



ESOPs Achieve Workplace Goals in Retention, Productivity, and Retirement Wealth

An employee stock ownership plan (ESOP) can be a powerful tool for saving jobs, recruiting top talent, retaining people, and building retirement wealth. And while it may not be the best option for all companies, a growing number of Iowa businesses are finding success in using ESOPs to meet their workforce objectives.

Folience Inc. is a Cedar Rapids-based umbrella company that evolved into its current form in 2017. Its media industry holdings, including the Cedar Rapids Gazette, date back to 1884. Also in 2017, Folience diversified into manufacturing with the acquisition of Life Line Emergency Vehicles, a custom ambulance manufacturer in Sumner. Purchasing the privately held business and converting it to a 100% ESOP ensured the future of the company and the 180 jobs it provides.

"It's about keeping jobs and tax dollars in our communities," said Daniel Goldstein, Folience president and CEO. "The data I've seen for Iowa suggest that nearly 29,000 businesses will transition ownership over the next decade. For

many companies, the choice will be to sell or close. If a business is sold to a private equity firm, which often happens, statistics show it will be up for sale again in three to five years, or it will be moved out of the community to be merged or consolidated with a larger corporation."

"With employee ownership, you're investing in the people and the community. No employee is ever going to vote to send their job out of state," Goldstein added.

Goldstein also credits employee ownership with improved safety, better productivity, greater profitability, and an overall better workplace environment.

"These are things that keep employees," he said. "We've had employees stay into

AT A GLANCE

Folience Inc.

FOUNDED: 1884

OVERVIEW: ESOP holding company.

EMPLOYEES: 500

FOR MORE: www.folience.com

Timberline

FOUNDED: 1993

OVERVIEW: Contract manufacturer of wire harnesses, electrical control panels, electronics and communication equipment.

EMPLOYEES: 230

FOR MORE: www.timberlinemfg.com

their fourth decade; that's an astounding level of retention."

With an ESOP, employees own shares in their company. At Folience, 90% contribute to their 401(k) with an average contribution of 7.58%, which is matched with company stock. They also earn an annual allocation of company stock, regardless of their 401(k) participation.

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Folience Inc. is the parent company for the Cedar Rapids Gazette. The newspaper began publishing in 1884; it has been 100% employee owned since 2012.

“The majority of our employees are on track to accumulate the wealth they need to fully fund their retirement,” Goldstein said.

Folience recently received the National 2022 Employee-Owned Company of the Year award from the ESOP Association.

“I’m careful to tell everyone that we’re not the biggest, best, or most profitable ESOP, but if we can achieve this, if we can make a difference for our employees, then every employee-owned company can do the same.”

Timberline Manufacturing Company, a Marion-based assembler of wire harnesses and control boards, has been 100% employee owned since 2012. Tom Pientok, Timberline’s CEO, credits the ESOP with improving the company in ways that benefit both the employees and customers.

“As a result of the ESOP, our employees work harder and smarter, produce better quality products, and are more innovative,” Pientok said.

Joy Donald, CIRAS strategic advisor, encourages business owners faced with a transition decision to consider the ESOP structure. “It allows them to preserve their legacy while benefitting the employees that they care about,” she said. “This single decision can alter the trajectory of employees’ lives in a way that is profoundly fulfilling.”

While there are sound reasons for transitioning to an ESOP, Donald noted

there are potential challenges as well. “ESOPs have a built-in pressure to maximize individual and corporate productivity—getting the most value possible from every asset, including people,” Donald said. “This can lead to terrific company value, but it’s important to intentionally manage this pressure to prevent employee burnout.”

Businesses that use ESOPs reap multiple benefits, but the structure isn’t for everyone. Companies with a small workforce, high turnover, or low profits may not be strong candidates for employee ownership.

“First, I am a strong advocate of ESOPs, but if there are too few employees, the level of expense and compliance will be burdensome,” said Lindy Ireland, vice president of BCC Advisers, a company whose expertise includes ESOP valuations. “If the profitability trend is consistently downward, there will be a corresponding downward trend in share value, which would not be an appropriate investment for an employee benefit plan. Also, if there is high turnover in your workforce, a lot of effort will be spent putting people in and taking people out of the plan, which isn’t beneficial for anyone.”

Finally, Ireland noted that fiduciary responsibility is required for the ESOP, which includes careful documentation for the IRS and the Department of Labor to ensure rigorous due diligence has been applied to oversight of the plan.

➤ **For more information, contact Joy Donald at jdonald@iastate.edu or 319-359-0206.**

On the cover: Life Line Emergency Vehicles recently transitioned to an ESOP, a move that kept nearly 200 jobs in the rural town of Sumner.

CIRAS Mission: *Every day we will enhance the performance of industry through applied research, education, and technical assistance.*

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Understanding Government Bid Process Pays Off

A family-owned welding business founded 39 years ago in southwest Iowa used its ongoing relationship with CIRAS to further its understanding of the government bid process. As a result, they've recently been awarded two contracts from the USDA Forest Service totaling more than \$256,000.

Gregory Welding, located in Sidney, had previously completed their System for Award Management (SAM) registration, which is required to bid on government contracts. Jenna Gregory, secretary at the company, found an opportunity online that she thought would be a good fit. She reached out to Justin Niceswanger, a government contracting specialist with the CIRAS Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC), who helped her respond to the request for quote (RFQ).

“The first thing we talked about was how they could use some of the language from their SAM registration in the proposal, specifically language from the representations and certifications sections,” Niceswanger said. “And then we assessed the rest of the RFQ to make sure they understood what was being asked of them. The documents can be ambiguous, and CIRAS is able to provide some clarification.”

Gregory Welding was founded in 1983 by Greg Gregory, who was joined by sons Jared in 2017 and Jason in 2020. The primary focus of the business is metal fabrication for government, commercial, military, and industry projects. The recent awards were for the manufacture of greenhouse tables for a facility in Nebraska and metal fence posts for Oregon’s Deschutes National Forest.

In addition to walking the Gregorlys through the RFQ process, Niceswanger reviewed their bid documents to confirm they understood what they were agreeing to and that the bid packet was complete.

Gregory Welding continues to submit bids for new awards. “When we present a proposal, we do so with confidence because we know it has been properly and correctly done,” said Jenna. “We even received a compliment on a proposal we submitted. We didn’t win the award, but we were told our submission was very professional and well put together.”

One tool used by Gregory Welding is the no-cost bid match services made available by CIRAS to clients, which alerts businesses to opportunities related to their products or services.

“This service allows us to match bid opportunities with a client’s capabilities and saves time for businesses so they don’t have to manually search dozens of websites on their own,” Niceswanger said.

AT A GLANCE

Gregory Welding

FOUNDED: 1983

OVERVIEW: Metal fabrication for government, commercial, military, and industry projects.

EMPLOYEES: 6

IMPACT: Secured more than \$256,000 in government contracts.

FOR MORE: www.facebook.com/Gregory-Welding-893590387410128



Gregory Welding, a family-owned company for three generations, was recently awarded more than \$256,000 in government contracts.

➤ For more information, contact Justin Niceswanger at jnice@iastate.edu or 515-509-9565.

Fall Career Fair Dates

Agriculture and Life Sciences Ag Career Day

- Tuesday, October 11, 2022
9:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.

www.career.cals.iastate.edu/cals-career-day

Business, Industry, and Technology Career Fair

- Wednesday, September 21, 2022
12:00–5:00 p.m.

www.ivybusiness.iastate.edu/event/fall-business-industry-and-technology-career-fair/

Engineering Career Fair

- Wednesday, September 14, 2022
12:00–5:00 p.m.
- Tuesday, September 20, 2022
12:00–5:00 p.m.
- Thursday, September 29, 2022
10:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.; Virtual through CyHire

www.engineering.iastate.edu/ecs/employers/career-fair

People to People Career Fair

Hosted by the Colleges of Human Sciences and Liberal Arts and Sciences

- September 30, 2022
10:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

careers.las.iastate.edu/find-a-job/career-fairs/people-to-people/

Tips for Employers

- ✓ Make sure your positions are posted in CyHire before attending the career fair.
- ✓ Increase name recognition by hosting an info session.
- ✓ Engage with all students at the career fair to help promote your company.



HNI Corporation engages all members in continuous improvement discussions.

Using Continuous Improvement Strategies to Recruit, Retain Workers

A growing number of companies are working with the CIRAS Iowa Lean Consortium (ILC) on continuous improvement strategies that empower employees to be problem solvers, sending the message that workers are appreciated and valued.

Nearly 50 million workers quit their jobs in 2021 in a trend that some have called the Great Resignation. A recent Pew Research Center survey highlighted the various reasons why people quit their jobs. The third most cited reason for quitting was “felt disrespected at work,” after low pay and lack of opportunities for advancement.

“A well-implemented continuous improvement program can increase workforce retention and help an organization become an employer of choice,” said Tracy Schuster, productivity program director. “When adopted as a company mindset, a continuous improvement program can empower your workforce to become problem solvers, reduce their frustration,

and help your team members find joy and purpose in their work.”

The ILC assists companies with actionable ways to implement continuous improvement tools and techniques.

“Our membership fulfills a need for ideas and resources to continue our efforts,” said Greg Neuwoehner, continuous improvement manager at ESAPCO. “It also provides us continuing education for industry professionals, training and guidance for entry-level associates, and a way to stay connected to peers.”

ESAPCO, founded in 1979, sells products to the agricultural, horticultural, building, and retail trade industries.

Even companies with a long history of successful continuous improvement



HNI engages people at all levels of the organization in their continuous improvement strategy.

SAVE THE DATE: ILC Annual Conference

The annual conference of the Iowa Lean Consortium (ILC) is scheduled for October 25. A hybrid event is planned to ensure easy access for all interested members and organizations. The event will be offered in person at the Meadows Event and Conference Center in Altoona; breakout sessions and keynote addresses will be livestreamed.

The hybrid format continues to best meet the needs of members, said Tracy Schuster, ILC program director.

“Some members are ready to meet in person, but others will find they’re unable to attend for a variety of reasons,” Schuster added. “But whether you participate in person or by livestream, this will be a full day of learning and connecting with others.”

The annual conference is traditionally the largest and most extensive networking and learning opportunity hosted by the ILC. Last year, a record-breaking 120 companies and organizations were represented at the event, which drew more than 320 participants.

This year’s conference features keynote speakers selected by ILC members. Jake Wood, a former Marine and founder of a disaster-relief organization, will deliver the opening keynote address on leading through chaos. Closing out the daylong conference will be Mike Rayburn, a comedian, musician, innovator, and outdoor enthusiast. He will challenge attendees to consider the impact of applying just a fraction of what they learn at the conference to their work situations.

The event includes three sessions with concurrent breakouts. Tours are also being planned. The conference is open to everyone, but ILC members will have priority registration at a reduced rate.

For more information, contact Tracy Schuster at tschust@iastate.edu or 515-715-0614.



Learn more!

efforts benefit from ILC membership.

HNI Corporation, a worldwide manufacturer of workplace furniture and residential building products, was founded in Muscatine in 1947 with the intent to employ America’s veterans returning from World War II while addressing the need for more enlightened approaches to employer-employee relations. HNI has used continuous improvement thinking throughout its history and formally began its continuous improvement journey in 1992. Sharing best practices, hosting and participating in tours, networking, and attending events like the annual conference are benefits of ILC membership that HNI has used most.

As part of HNI’s continuous improvement effort, employees (referred to as members since the

“A well implemented continuous improvement program can increase workforce retention and help an organization become an employer of choice.”
— Tracy Schuster

company’s founding) are encouraged to offer ideas for improving the workplace. Todd Murphy, vice president of continuous improvement at HNI, said that last year more than 100,000 member-implemented ideas were completed.

“When members are engaged at that level, it makes a real difference,” he said.

Companies can begin the continuous improvement process on their own by simply walking through the workplace, watching the people do the work, and listening to what they say about the tasks they do. In Lean circles, it’s called the Gemba principle. If you want an outside perspective, the CIRAS productivity team can facilitate an assessment. The assessment will help businesses chart a vision and next steps.

➤ **For more information, contact Tracy Schuster at tschust@iastate.edu or 515-715-0164.**



A drive system to get power to the back wheels of a two-person bike was one of several capstone projects undertaken this past academic year.

Engineering Capstone Program Gets High Marks from Industry

The relationship between Iowa industry and CIRAS has been pivotal to the growth of an Iowa State University program that helps senior engineering students apply what they've learned in the classroom to a real-world setting.

“Because CIRAS works with manufacturers across the state, they are uniquely positioned to see opportunities within companies for student projects,” said Jim Heise, capstone coordinator for the Department of Mechanical Engineering. “That’s a big reason for our growth and success.”

The current incarnation of the mechanical engineering capstone program was started in 2008. The first year the program had 16 teams and 1 industry sponsor. For the 2021–2022 academic year, 60 teams worked on 26 industry-sponsored projects. Projects included designing greenhouses for soybean research, creating 3D printing systems to produce houses, designing a drive system for a two-person bicycle, and more.

Jake Behrens, CIRAS project manager, said that capstone projects are popular for businesses throughout Iowa. “Whether the company is looking for

an innovative solution to a problem or looking to build their pipeline of talent, there are capstone programs that work for them.”

Gomaco Trolley Company, a manufacturer of vintage trolley cars in Ida Grove, recently engaged capstone students in a project to make variations on the heritage designs to suit specific project needs.

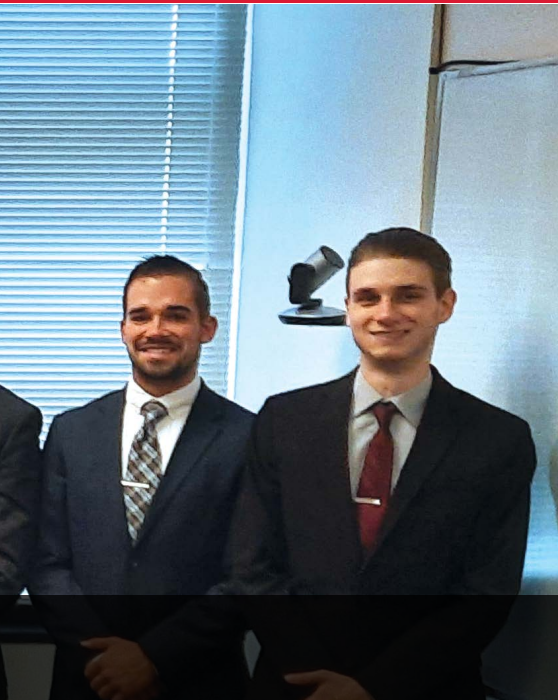
“The students brought a unique perspective to a difficult problem, which carries the potential for developing a valuable solution,” said Lex Jacobson, trolley company manager. “We also feel our participation increased our exposure with faculty and students, which is a potential benefit to recruiting.”

“I want projects that...
push students or
challenge them but at
the same time give
them the opportunity to
experience success so
they can gain confidence
in what they do.”
— Jim Heise

Dan Parrish, an engineering manager with Pella Corporation, has also worked with engineering students on capstone projects. “We’ve definitely benefited from the innovation and outside perspective they bring,” he said.

Students recently completed their work on a large forage cart with a 40-ton dumping capacity for Art’s Way Manufacturing. The scale of the product enabled Darren McGregor, director of engineering, to have groups of students working on different aspects of the project. McGregor was impressed with the group’s expertise and professionalism.

“We’ve sponsored a number of capstone projects, and some bear more fruit



Above: Students visit a manufacturer to learn additional details about their capstone project.
Below: Students showcase their project's final prototype.

than others, but it's always high-quality work," he said.

Completion of a capstone project is a graduation requirement for all engineering students.

In selecting capstone projects, Heise considers three criteria: his students' skill sets, whether the project can be well defined, and whether it can be completed in one semester.

"What I'm looking for are those back-burner projects... projects that a company would like to do but doesn't have resources at the time," Heise said. "I want projects that will teach students to rely on each other, collaborate, delegate, and support one another. I look for projects that make students think about the people they're impacting and the consequences of not following through on what's expected of them. Projects should push students or challenge them but at the same time give them the opportunity to experience success so they can gain confidence in what they do."

➤ For more information, contact Mayra Ramirez at ramirezm@iastate.edu or 515-520-3101.



AT A GLANCE

Percival Scientific

FOUNDED: 1886

OVERVIEW: Manufacturer of custom-made environment-controlled cabinets.

EMPLOYEES: 80

FOR MORE:
www.percival-scientific.com

Company and CIRAS Explore Adjacent Market

A worldwide leader in the design and manufacture of custom-made environment-controlled cabinets credits CIRAS with bringing a possible new market space to their attention.

Percival Scientific, founded in 1886 and located in Perry, is exploring the feasibility of adapting its current product line to include cabinets for aging and fermenting meat. The idea was suggested to the company by Paul Gormley, a CIRAS project manager.

"I'd been working with meat processors and noticed that one trend in the industry was aged meats," said Gormley. "I'd also done projects with Percival Scientific, and I knew their capabilities. That got me thinking about what could happen if we put those two things together."

Gormley took the idea to Terry Houser at the Iowa State University Meats Lab, who agreed that both aging and fermenting—a process used in products like summer sausage—could be done in climate-controlled chambers like those made at Percival. Gormley next approached the business.

"As a company we're always looking at expansion opportunities," said Joni Campidilli, vice president of sales and marketing at Percival. "This idea appealed to us because we saw how we could potentially get into a new market space without making a lot of changes to our current product line."

Percival Scientific started as a dealer of tools and equipment for butchers. In the early 1900s, the company introduced one of the nation's first display cases for refrigerated produce and meats. The next several decades were spent manufacturing a complete line of made-to-order commercial refrigerated display cabinets.

Percival built its first environment-controlled cabinet for growing plants in the early 1950s at the request of Iowa State University. Within three decades, the cabinets accounted for half the company's business. In 1989, Percival completely ceased manufacturing commercial display units to focus entirely on controlled-environment products.

No final decision on a new product line has been made, though the company plans to gauge interest in the concept at a food industry trade show. They'll go armed with research done by CJ Osborn, a CIRAS project manager. Osborn assisted the company by reviewing secondary research, and by working closely with a market research professional to create a survey on

the demand for aging and fermenting cabinets and also completing interviews with prospective stakeholders like chefs and sausage makers.

"We were so energized by what CJ and team brought to us," Campidilli said. "They covered how to bring a new product to market, how to launch it, and how to interview prospective customers. They gave us everything we need to decide what we want to do next."

➤ **For more information, contact CJ Osborn at cjosborn@iastate.edu or 641-840-0505.**

An expanded product line is under consideration by Percival Scientific, maker of custom-made environment-controlled cabinets.



Invoicing problems resolved; company gets paid

Assistance from the CIRAS Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) helped an Oskaloosa-based manufacturer address inaccuracies in their invoicing information that were delaying payment for a government job.

Larry Lewis, owner of Lewis Repair and Manufacturing, contacted CIRAS after experiencing a delay in getting paid for an incinerator he delivered to a military base in Florida. Samantha Ferm, CIRAS government contracting specialist, determined that information in Lewis' System for Award Management (SAM) profile contained an outdated email address.

Ferm helped Lewis update his SAM information, unarchive his company's account, and access the system he needed to use to submit his invoice. Once the issues in his profile were addressed and a new invoice submitted, Lewis was promptly paid.

"The government has a certain way of doing things, and I understand that," he said. "But this was more than I could handle without help. Samantha really went the extra mile for me."

There were several factors that made it difficult for Lewis to detect the paperwork errors on his own. The work CIRAS did will make the invoicing process easier for Lewis in the future.

Ferm said her work with the company was also a learning experience for her.

"This project showed me that even individuals who work in contracting on military bases don't necessarily understand the process of doing business with the federal government from the client's perspective, which makes it confusing for everyone involved, especially the client," she said. "I'm glad our team is here to support small businesses that would truly be stuck without some extra help."

For more information, contact Samantha Ferm at siferm@iastate.edu or 319-333-9558.

AT A GLANCE

Lewis Repair and Manufacturing

FOUNDED: 2009

OVERVIEW: Manufactures, delivers, and installs incinerators.

EMPLOYEES: 3

IMPACT: Received payment of more than \$20,000 on overdue invoice.

Giving Clients Access to a World-class Facility

A partnership with the Iowa State University Meats Laboratory gives Iowa meat producers access to world-class research, technology, and training to keep them informed, updated, and competitive.

"CIRAS helps us educate processors on basic meat science as well as advances in food processing and food safety technology," said Terry Houser, associate professor and extension meat specialist at Iowa State.

The lab hosts as many as 20 short courses each year, attracting more than 200 participants. CIRAS provides funding and programmatic support to ensure the Meats Lab can deliver world-class education at a reasonable cost to Iowa manufacturers.

"Their short courses reach a global audience on a range of subjects," said Troy Crowe, CIRAS project manager. "It's a great networking opportunity because participants get to interact with each other, guest speakers, and Meats Lab personnel."

The courses attract everyone from research and development personnel to production supervisors to equipment manufacturers and suppliers.

The Meats Lab can also assist with research and development of new products and provide guidance on the use of new equipment like grinders and mixers.

"Let's say someone wants to add a new ingredient to pepperoni. If they're not a meat scientist, they'll likely have trouble knowing where to begin. We can help with that. We have a USDA-inspected processing space and the expertise to take them through the entire product development process from idea to fabrication," said Houser.

Houser calls the CIRAS relationship "symbiotic," noting that each partner gets equal value from working together.

"We need CIRAS out there to let people know that we're here and that we have the expertise to help them improve," said Houser. "And Iowa businesses are better off because of the knowledge we share with them."

For more information, contact Troy Crowe at crowe@iastate.edu or 515-203-7735.

Summer sausage is packed at the ISU Meats Laboratory. The lab is a USDA-inspected facility that provides training and research to food processors.



Assistance with Flow-down Clauses Helps Ensure Contract Compliance

Roxanne Schlue was two months into her new job at LMT Defense when the Eldridge company received one of its largest-ever federal contracts. Schlue's job as compliance manager was to ensure that the appropriate flow-down clauses were passed along to subcontractors. For assistance with that, she turned to the CIRAS Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC).

"When you agree to a contract with the federal government, you agree to dozens of different clauses," said Samantha Ferm, CIRAS government contracting specialist. "For companies like LMT, there are federal requirements as well as requirements specific to the Department of Defense. The question becomes which of these requirements get passed down to subcontractors so that everyone is compliant."

LMT Defense was founded in 1980 as Lewis Machine and Tool Company.

AT A GLANCE

LMT Defense

FOUNDED: 1980

OVERVIEW: Manufactures precision-engineered weapons and weapon systems.

EMPLOYEES: 180

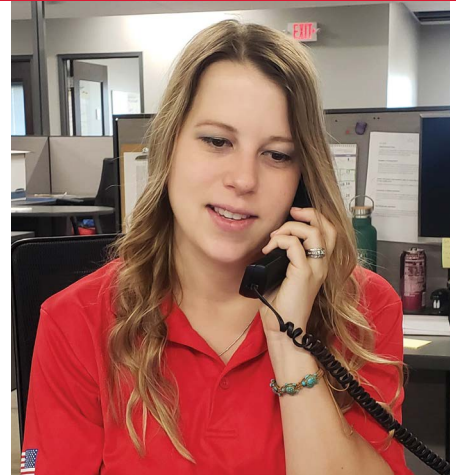
IMPACT: Provided resources to clarify flow-down clauses for subcontractors on federal contracts valued at \$5 million.

FOR MORE: www.lmtdefense.com

The company provides the U.S. military, law enforcement, and government agencies with precision-engineered weapons and weapon systems. They often use subcontractors, and since they're responsible for the actions of anyone they source from, it's critical to know which terms and conditions of a contract need to be passed along. Noncompliance at any level has severe consequences including termination for default, which can end a company's career as a government contractor.

Schlue had the opportunity to work with several members of the CIRAS team. They provided best practices from other manufacturers and agencies that do work for the federal government. They also provided online resources to help Schlue develop a matrix to track the various clauses in the LMT contract.

"It was really about figuring out the requirements of the contract," Schlue said. "CIRAS helped me understand the regulations and how to manage them for ourselves and our suppliers. With



"CIRAS helped me understand the regulations and how to manage them for ourselves and our suppliers. With their assistance, LMT Defense was able to ensure compliance with our U.S. military contracts."

— Roxanne Schlue

their assistance, LMT Defense was able to ensure compliance with our U.S. military contracts."

LMT Defense has a long-standing relationship with CIRAS, which includes assistance with ISO certification, a requirement of many federal and international contracts.

➤ **For more information, contact Samantha Ferm at siferm@iastate.edu or 319-333-9558.**

STAFF NEWS



Bruce Janvrin has joined CIRAS as a materials project manager.

Bruce holds a PhD from Iowa State University in mechanical engineering with a metallurgy minor. With more than 25 years of experience working in manufacturing, Bruce comes to CIRAS from Arcosa Wind Towers in Newton, Iowa, where he served as an engineer providing manufacturing engineering and design support.

Bruce will work directly with Iowa businesses to improve products and processes using his metallurgical expertise.

■ Market Segmentation and Prospecting

September 1, 2022

This webinar is designed to show small and medium-sized Iowa businesses how to use publicly available sources to segment the marketplace and prospect for new customers. Attendees will learn how to expand into new markets, broaden their customer base, and grow.

■ Your I4.0 Journey: Tackling Workforce Shortages with Automation

September 1, 2022

This event will help production managers, manufacturing engineers, and company decision makers understand the basics of industrial automation, including how it works and how to prepare.

■ DIY Market Research—Hands-on Event

September 20, 2022

This six-hour event is a hands-on class aimed at teaching Iowa manufacturers the skills necessary to develop their own basic market research. Participants will discover free and low-cost resources for investigating the competitive landscape and exploring industry trends, as well as learning how to use online surveys to collect information on customer perceptions, level of satisfaction, and other key metrics.

■ Human Resource Series: Where Are Our Workers?

September 21, 2022

This is a virtual event on the third Wednesday of each month to share best practices from accomplished human resource professionals. Attendees will learn from guest speakers who share insider knowledge, offer new perspectives, and share case studies.

■ Preparing a Winning Proposal

October 12, 2022

In this workshop, you'll learn everything from how to read and answer an RFP to tips for organizing your proposal and getting questions answered. You'll also learn how to avoid some of the most common mistakes.

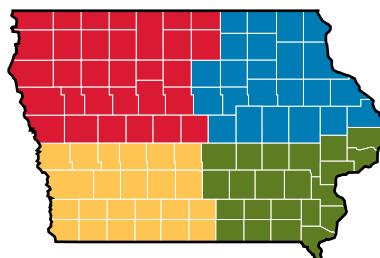
For details on these and other events, visit www.ciras.iastate.edu/events-workshops.

CIRAS Engage. Educate. Embed.

Since 1963, we have delivered proven services to enhance the performance of industry. Our approach—Engage. Educate. Embed.—creates specific solutions that allow each business and its community to prosper and grow. Coupled with a satisfaction guarantee, our typical client has achieved a 200% ROI. Clients have reported an economic impact of more than \$2.8 billion over the past five years.

Locate your county to find your best introduction to CIRAS.

In addition to four regional account managers, CIRAS has a statewide account manager for the food industry and five regional government contracting specialists.



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- Iowa State University
- Center for Crops Utilization Research
- Center for Nondestructive Evaluation
- College of Engineering
- Department of Economics
- Department of Environmental Health and Safety
- Engineering Career Services
- Extension and Outreach
- Iowa Grain Quality Initiative
- Meat Science Extension
- Polymer and Food Protection Consortium
- Structural Engineering Research Laboratory
- Alliant Energy
- Iowa Area Development Group
- Iowa Association of Business and Industry
- Iowa Association of Community College Trustees
- Iowa Department of Transportation
- Iowa Economic Development Authority
- Iowa Farm Bureau
- Iowa Sustainable Business Forum
- Quad Cities Chamber

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WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

Developing Your Own Workforce Strategy *By Joy Donald*

It's no secret that Iowa businesses are struggling under the weight of current workforce constraints. So how can your company mitigate the impact? Over the long run, an organization-wide workforce strategy that collaboratively optimizes attraction, retention, productivity, and automation can help.

This plan should be developed within the context of your regular strategic planning cycle. Strategy expert Michael Porter stated that a company can outperform rivals only if it can establish a difference of value to customers that can be preserved over time. During the strategic planning process the leadership team identifies the company's unique value to the market, what the market is willing to pay for that unique value, what the company defines as "success" (e.g., revenue and profit targets), and what competencies and resources the company needs to obtain to realize that success. Most manufacturers cannot secure the labor needed to fully deliver their unique value to customers. This presents a huge opportunity. Those companies that deliberately develop strategic competence around navigation of workforce challenges stand to enjoy a significant competitive advantage.

A company's workforce strategy is its plan for developing that competency. It clearly articulates the company's answer to the following questions: (a) How much labor (i.e., hours, knowledge, and skills) do we need to achieve the success measures outlined in our strategic plan? (b) How much labor do we currently have? (c) What will we do differently to close the gap and maintain results?

Although your human resources leader will play a key role throughout planning and implementation, it is imperative that the entire leadership team collaboratively develops the workforce strategy. This effort includes the identification and prioritization of strategic initiatives to close workforce gaps. At a high level, there are only three types of initiatives to choose from: (1) more effectively attract new employees; (2) retain more of your current employees; and/or (3) get more output from your current employees, through either increases in productivity or the adoption of labor-saving technologies.

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