



Bob Lloyd, President Bodine Aluminum

St. Louis and Troy
www.bodinealuminum.com

Bodine Aluminum began as a jobbing foundry in 1912, creating castings for all types of industries. Some 80 years later, the company caught the eye of Toyota and became the supplier of cylinder heads and blocks for its North American operations. President Bob Lloyd talks about what it has been like to work for this innovative automaker.

"When Toyota came along in 1990 and bought us, we continued to operate a plant in St. Louis. Then we built this plant [in Troy, Missouri] in 1993. We use Toyota technology to produce cylinder heads and cylinder blocks.

"When you're owned by a company like Toyota, you can weather some downturns. Even through the downturn, we kept everybody working. No one was let go. We did a lot of painting, and we did a lot of training. And community service. We helped clean up parks and build houses. But we kept everybody working."

And people want to keep working.

"This plant's been open since '93. We have a lot of people that started here then and are still with us. The St. Louis plant was open in 1912, so we've had a little turnover there. (laughs) Most employees stay until they retire.

"We have a Floor Management Development System, which is basically daily meetings to solve problems. We set certain objectives for the year, and the managers and group leaders look for how to achieve the company objectives. It might be a quality or safety or cost objective.

"If they see that they're not attaining the target, they keep breaking down the problem until they find some root causes. This practice came from the Toyota side. They taught us, and now we're teaching the rest of the management group."

During a time when business in general — and the auto industry in particular — has been in decline, Bodine has held on. According to Lloyd, a Missouri location has helped the company weather the storm.

"Central location has been key to Bodine's success. When you're selling to companies all over the country, you have some advantages with transportation costs. Others in the east and west have trouble, but you can get anywhere from Missouri, pretty much in any direction.

"Training is pretty much done internally, and that's where we get a really good boost from Missouri. We get a great reimbursement from the state to allow us to continue that training.

"The state helped us build the [training] facility, and, depending on how many hours of training we perform,

the state will reimburse us. It's pretty generous. And it's a simple system. It's not paper-heavy process, so it encourages businesses to utilize those funds."

On-the-job training works, says Lloyd, because Bodine's employees are ready learners.

"We have a close relationship with [Missouri S & T University in] Rolla. At least once a year, a professor brings in a group. We recruit a lot of engineers from S & T, too. Even our production managers are engineers.

"What's really great about Rolla is that their engineers like working on the floor. They're hands-on. They're out there. And they've got the whole process that they're responsible for — machines, dies, quality, productivity. They have to be active on the floor. We don't need desk engineers.

One comment we hear from Toyota is that they're impressed with the rural area workers, because they have a farming background and they're not afraid of hard work. They are keenly aware of the formula: savings – costs = profit.

"Our team members don't have a particular background. They're farmers. Or they've worked in hospitals or in other manufacturing plants. Some are police officers. We're looking for a good attitude."

And what does the future look like for Bodine Aluminum?

"We're finally starting to see some growth. It's been a tough year and a half. But we had a great owner who took care of everybody, and we're starting to see the increase in business!

"We would never have had the growth if it weren't for Toyota. They've been awfully good to all of us. They've had the same management group here since they bought us 20 years ago. That's unusual. Usually, a company comes in and buys another company, they're going to replace the management. But they didn't do that at all. They supported our management.

"We appreciate the interest that Missouri's government has in us. We have had every governor visit us since we started up in '92. Congressmen, too.

The founders' sons are also regular visitors to the plant, according to Lloyd.

"They are vibrant 80-year-olds. They stay engaged. And they can't believe what we've done!"