



Making far East products succeed in far East Anglia

Hutchinson Interim Operations Management Case Study

Client: Ichiban UK Ltd
Product: Sushi
Assignment: Interim Operations Director
Interim Manager: Andrea Scholes

Sometimes a simple “holding” role is not quite as simple as it seems...

The Background

Ichiban, based in Earl Stonham, Suffolk, is the largest producer of Sushi in Europe. Their clients include most of the UK Grocery multiples, including Tesco, Boots, Morrisons and EAT. Sushi is a chilled, complex product that requires great levels of care to produce – it is also very labour intensive – quite a challenge for any manufacturer.

The Task

The initial brief for Hutchinson was to locate an Operations Manager to provide interim cover whilst a permanent replacement could be found. However, it was only once the interim was found and in situ that the assignment started to get interesting – it was clear that there were two major issues that needed to be urgently addressed: Quality and Labour Cost.

The Solution

A strong track record of interim success gained in leading UK Food companies meant that Andrea Scholes was ideally positioned for this role. Andrea was one of the first names on Hutchinson’s database, arriving by recommendation and quickly becoming one of our “interim elite”. Shortly after arrival at Ichiban, Andrea started to address the urgent issues.

Starting with Quality, Andrea gave clear briefings to the team on her expectations and the need for ownership of quality. In addition, Andrea introduced “daily management positive product release” sessions – this meant that products did not leave the site without a review of all aspects of quality/labeling. This initiative alone prevented 2 red alerts in the first 2 weeks. A daily morning review meeting was introduced where Quality was given the highest priority. Andrea made daily factory tours with shift managers to review technical standards.

The other main problem was Labour Cost spiraling out of control. Amongst other initiatives, Andrea quickly introduced daily measures – these were reviewed at the morning meeting and daily/weekly graphs were produced showing each shift’s progress. Some very tight overtime controls were launched as well as a review of the crew sizes and an emphasis placed on line balancing.

The Outcome

Financially, the operation was turned around and complaints were halved. The customers were delighted with the quality improvements and the company continues to thrive.

Hutchinson Consultancy are one of the leading providers of interim managers to the food industry and part of a group that has recruited for 74 out of the top 100 food companies in the UK (Its Food 2008). In 2010 Hutchinson were runners up in an independent poll of over fifty national interim management providers to ascertain “best service” (InterimJobsNet). Six years on, our first customer still uses us.

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