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LESS THRILLS, MORE PARTS!

Ashland Technologies prides itself on turning "metal into thrills." But when it comes to labor, the maker of roller coaster parts could do with a little *less* excitement.

"It's getting harder and harder to find the right people," said Bill Wydra of Ashland Technologies. But labor shortages aren't the only reason Ashland added robots.

"We have an incredibly talented team and we wanted a better way to leverage their skills," he said. By adding machine tending robots, Ashland was able to free up their most skilled machinists and operators for more challenging tasks.

"We hire smart people and we don't want them standing around all day loading and unloading parts," he said.

FROM COVID TO COBOTS

Ironically, it was Covid that really got him thinking about robots.

Like so many manufacturers, the pandemic hit Ashland hard, forcing the company to go from 60 to 8 shop employees.

"We had to learn to do more with less," he said. With so few people, his team started seriously innovating, finding new ways to cut cycle times and improve processes.

As Ashland regrew the business, the company was surprised to find they didn't need quite as many people as before.

"We were doing more with 30 people than when we had 60 people," said Wydra, who credits the focus on process improvements made during Covid.

ROBOTS: THE LOGICAL NEXT STEP

Hungry for even more savings, Wydra decided to experiment with robots. Not only did the robots help him add shifts without having to hire anyone new, it freed up his team for more complex work.

"Our people love to innovate and now they can," Wydra said.

With plans to add two more robots in 2023, Wydra believes robots are essential to the growth and prosperity of U.S. manufacturers.

"The country just doesn't have the labor it needs to remain competitive in global manufacturing. It's not a matter of choice anymore," he said.

ASHLAND TECHNOLOGIES, INC.

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