

# AmeriWater named Manufacturing Business of the Year

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Everyday in the United States, more than 200,000 people rely on kidney dialysis treatment to keep them alive. And many of them are relying on AmeriWater Corp., a Dayton company that makes water purification systems used for kidney dialysis treatment.

AmeriWater makes systems that cleanse water of its impurities. The company got its start in 1980 when Medicare began reimbursing for dialysis treatment, making dialysis affordable for the masses. Ultra-pure water is crucial for dialysis, which uses a solution that's 95 percent water. Anything in the water could move from it into the blood.

The dialysis business has been good for AmeriWater, but the company has taken major steps to keep up with market changes since 2003 that are paying off now. The company has transformed its sales process as well as made internal changes to energize its 38 employees. The result has been a 20 percent jump in sales, said President Jim Baker.

That success has garnered the company the Dayton Business Journal's Manufacturer of the Year award.

AmeriWater had sold its system directly to dialysis clinics and hospitals for years.

Because of changes in the industry and AmeriWater's geographic reach, AmeriWater started selling more through dealers. Baker built a training room to bring dealers in to educate them on the AmeriWater product. Management spent most of its time working on the shift to dealers.

Because of the tough transition, staff morale crashed. The stress of competition and bringing on new products took its toll. "As the management team tried to get dealers on line, they were really disenfranchised," Baker said.

Noticing the slump, Chief Executive Officer Diane Dolan introduced what she called "AmeriWater II," a new company model that aimed to give workers more attention and control in the company while also laying out some tough rules about attitude and work.

She wrote out job descriptions and laid out corporate expectations. She put in place a new system for positive recognition called P.E.E.T.: Program to Ensure Everyone is Thanked.

She gave all employees the right to call a "download meeting" if they need more information on a product or have some sort of problem. Someone from each department will attend a download meeting including either Dolan or Baker.

"It's a way for all of us to communicate," Dolan said.

The changes have propelled sales and internal attitudes. Dolan was a little nervous about the changes, but the reception was great, she said.

Baker credits much of last year's 20 percent growth to the internal changes. The company is working on building its industrial water purification business, which now makes up about 40 percent of AmeriWater's business. As he signs new industrial clients, Baker hopes the segment will make up about half of the business.

But it has been dialysis that has been the company's growth engine. "We got sucked in at the right time," Baker said.



1303 Stanley Avenue  
Dayton, Ohio 45404  
Phone: 800-535-5585  
www.amerewater.com