

# Ascentec / Sustaining Edge Solutions

## Partners in Performance Improvements

**Who** says machining isn't as glamorous as Hollywood? Ascentec doesn't. In fact over the past couple of weeks they leased out a portion of their building to the crew filming upcoming movie "The Kingdom", where for lunch each day, Jamie Foxx, Jason Bateman and Jennifer Garner, plus the supporting crew, ate in Ascentec's facility! But this is a metalworking/machining magazine. It's not about Ascentec's Hollywood experience....

This is really a story about a partnership in Performance Improvements. It is a teaming of the management team at Ascentec with Walter Tighe, President of Sustaining Edge Solutions. It is about a commitment by both companies over the past year to improve processes at Ascentec that would facilitate company growth. And with these strategic process improvements comes ISO9001 registration certification is realized, which the team says will be finalized in November of this year.

Five years ago in December 2001 (yes right after 9/11) two young entrepreneurial men, Frank Bouchal and Bob Edwards, left SpeedFam to start-up Ascentec. While most machine shops in the valley saw their work virtually dry up overnight, the opposite was true for Ascentec. Their niche service was refurbishing legacy 200-millimeter semiconductor fab equipment. With the semiconductor industry tightening their belts, reducing new fab purchases, the ability to re-use existing equipment meant big business for Ascentec. They filled a void in the industry.

The two were often frustrated when they had to wait for metal parts needed for their refurb business. They were young and small, and therefore low on the totem pole compared with machine shops' other customers. And it was this frustration that fueled the idea for Ascentec to own its own machine shop.

The two had no experience running a machine shop. They knew a master machinist who they bought from, though, and so in came partner number three, Lee Haggerty, who started up the machine shop two years ago. In the beginning the machine shop only did business for internal consumption. Today, only 30% of the machining business comes from internal work.

The business is expanding beyond the semiconductor segment today. Bob says that industry analysts forecast growth of only ~8% annually in this segment. Compare this with alternative energy, he says with a healthy forecasted annual growth of 40%. So the company now serves the aerospace and communications industries

and has plans for alternative energy products. These new markets require a company to be ISO certified, this along with managements

need to expand capabilities and market growth is why the company made the investment to improve operational and quality performance.

Today, the company extols the benefits of ISO9001. Bob says, "If you pick a good ISO consultant, he or she will pay for themselves ten-fold." The team agrees, and says if they couldn't mention that they were in the process of ISO certification, they would not have many of the customers they secured in the past year. And it's not just about using the "ISO" word, the management team all agree that they couldn't grow without these processes.

Prior to the performance improvement program, large customers audited Ascentec. The start-up company failed the audits and only retained these customers because of their relationships, new company status, and their superior customer service. Today, they moved from a tier 4 to a tier 1 supplier to a large customer, and they went from audit failure to a signed 10-year contract with one of their largest customers! These numbers quantify the financial benefits of performance improvements.

I inquired as to how Ascentec selected Sustaining Edge Solutions for its performance improvement program. It was for a multitude of reasons they said, but there are a few key items that stand out;

1) The company's knowledge base – President, Walter Tighe has more than 20 years experience in quality assurance and control, including over 5 years running his successful consulting and training business.

2) "It clicked with Walter. He speaks our language. (Walter and Bob are ex-military servicemen) and Walter knows machining. He used to be a heavy equipment mechanic."

3) "Walter is on our organizational chart. He is the quality director. We needed a company/ consultant who could hold our hands and coach us. We interviewed three companies. Walter was it".

For more information on Ascentec, please call Lee Haggerty, at 480-633-3946 or email company sales at lee.haggerty@ascentec-tec.com. For more information on Sustaining Edge Solutions, Inc., contact Walter Tighe at 888-572-9642, visit their website at [www.sustainingedge.com](http://www.sustainingedge.com) or via email at [walter.tighe@sustainingedge.com](mailto:walter.tighe@sustainingedge.com).

