

Shifting from Reactive to Proactive Ergonomics Management in Less Than a Year



Haylee Mercer

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HNI Corporation: An Organization of People

HNI Corporation (“HNI”) was founded in 1947 on the premise that all members be treated with respect and as equal owners of the enterprise. With more than 17 facilities across the United States, HNI is one of the largest office furniture manufacturers in the world and the world’s leader in residential hearth products.

HNI leaders have always believed in putting their team members and their safety first. With this desire, Haylee Mercer was brought on board in 2021 as Ergonomics Program Manager. Her primary responsibility was to assess, analyze, and develop a comprehensive, corporate-wide ergonomics program.

Discovering the Pain Points

Haylee began her role at HNI by leading efforts to reduce MSD risks. Haylee quickly realized that what HNI needed most was standardization and consistency in its process.

“We had people doing their best: creating briefs, making checklists for assessments, creating spreadsheets, and having physical therapists weighing in. However, the process wasn’t consistent, and the risk scoring method was hard to understand. Due to each facility using different types of measurements to assess ergonomic risk, one facility’s risk assessment score would be 32 and was considered high, compared to another facility where the score was 896. This made deciding where to prioritize our resources and attention a really big problem,” explained Haylee.

“In addition to the lack of standardization, the program lacked ergonomics awareness training for any of our members, so no one really knew how to help. Safety managers didn’t fully understand how to use ergonomic design guidelines to adjust workstations and make members’ work experience more comfortable,” she continued. “Then if there was a facility where processes seemed to be working, it was unclear how to share this information with another facility with a similar environment.”

Haylee realized that HNI needed a solution that could provide three things:

- 1. Standardization**—finding a consistent, unified system for assessments across all facilities.
- 2. Training**—educating members on the ergonomics process and providing training tools.
- 3. Visibility/Shareability**—having a platform that shared information with all facilities to improve efficiency.



Finding the Right Solution

Haylee was tasked with finding a solution that could be implemented across HNI's facilities and available to over 7,000 of its members. "When I first came aboard, I assessed the baseline and how each facility was managing its ergonomics process. Through my gap analysis, it became clear that we needed a software program to consolidate efforts and address our three main pain points."

After evaluating solutions that utilized wearables and ergonomics software, Haylee determined that the [VelocityEHS Industrial Ergonomics Solution](#) met all three of HNI's requirements. "We needed a solution with motion capture for easy, quick, and accurate assessments that performed the same analysis at every facility. We needed a training component to educate members on how to improve their work environment and implement ergonomics initiatives correctly. And, we needed all this data to be shared so we could track and monitor progress across all facilities. VelocityEHS was the only one that was going to solve *all* our problems."

Implementing the New Ergonomics Process

Once the VelocityEHS solution was selected, the implementation process began. "Based on the trends analysis, we had a pretty good idea of where we needed to focus our efforts. We focused on getting the higher-risk issues into the software first, completing the baseline assessments, then

prioritizing action. The great thing about the process was it was so easy for people to make progress: taking initiative to complete tasks, doing the training, providing solutions, and making improvements all on their own accord."

The process launched in February of 2022 and was fully implemented within six months across all manufacturing facilities. Once the program was rolled out, HNI continued to see improvements.

At the end of 2022, there were:

- 1,135 baseline job assessments captured
- Over 100 jobs with follow-ups
- 152 completed improvements
- 200 in-progress improvements
- 373 users trained in the use of the software

Unexpected Results

"Initially, our goal was to simply get the process started—just get the baseline assessments into the software. I never expected the member engagement to be as high as it has been," Haylee shared.

Before VelocityEHS Industrial Ergonomics, assessments took hours to complete, and data was inconsistent. Using the mobile-friendly motion capture system with AI-driven assessment tools, it now takes around 20 minutes to complete the assessment and 15 minutes to complete



a root cause analysis, where the software suggests controls for each job. The software makes it easy for members to take the initiative and make improvements to their work environment.

“We’re just over nine months in, and we are doing proactive risk assessments with our product development team. We weren’t expecting to break the reactive cycle this quickly. We are moving up the ergonomics maturity curve by developing processes with our design team and product development team that design out workstation issues before they even make it to the factory floor. As this software continues to be used and each facility takes ownership, it will help us shift our focus to macro-ergonomics principles, focusing more on the members. In my eyes, each member is *my* customer, and it’s important to make sure they are taken care of every day,” she explained.

Haylee not only credits the time-saving tools, but also believes the educational component has helped with positive results.

“The awareness training we’ve been doing is more robust because of the modules we have access to. They allow our members to more fully understand what ergonomics is and how they can benefit from it. One of my favorite stories to share is that, while doing assessments, we had a member who was lifting and leaning to move around a monitor to place an item on the conveyor belt. We were able to share the motion capture results in real time, showing where the high-risk movements were. Upon seeing the results and having the knowledge from the ergonomics training, the member realized they could simply move the monitor to remove the leaning motion causing the high-risk movement.”

In less than a year, HNI’s members have expressed appreciation for the efforts made to improve ergonomics and have reported feeling healthier while working. The results from implementing an ergonomics management process through [VelocityEHS Industrial Ergonomics software](#) have already proven invaluable, and Haylee is looking forward to growing [HNI’s](#) program into the future.



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