

# Susan Daly

At Sterling, our highly experienced team members and their passion for what they do are central to who we are. This month, we spoke with Susan Daly, Process Improvement Manager, to learn more about the measures Sterling is taking to enhance efficiency and cost-effectiveness in its daily processes and customer projects.

## Can you briefly describe your background and current role at Sterling?

I began working in the API manufacturing space just after receiving my PhD. Early in my career, I worked as a development chemist. I became interested in looking at what was driving inefficiencies in the production process, and seeking ways to increase efficiency. After several years, I had roles in business development and strategic planning before moving back into a technical role as Research & Development Manager.

Seeking to combine my experience in the lab with a business development focus once again, I began my career at Sterling five years ago as a Partnership Manager. In this role, I regularly engaged with customers to discuss their projects and objectives, serving as a mediator between customers and our chemistry and engineering teams. When Sterling established the process improvement team in 2019, I jumped at the opportunity to lead the department as Process Improvement Manager. I was excited by the idea of a position wholly focused on seeking ways to improve the business and maximise our customers' success.

This position has enabled me to harness the skills I've gained from different roles I've held over the years, from the hands-on, chemistry side to the customer-facing, business development side. My experience in different positions within the industry has given me a unique perspective on areas for improvement as well as customer objectives. It has also allowed me to regularly collaborate with team members across all different parts of the business, which I enjoy.

## How do you select which projects and initiatives to undertake?

The Process Improvement Team consider a lot of different factors when identifying areas for improvement. First, of course, is looking at our business through a critical lens. We specifically focus on runner and repeater processes that we manufacture regularly, and we try to identify ways to maximise throughput, accelerate productivity and reduce costs. Our team all has some extent of Lean Six Sigma training, which helps us approach process optimisation in a way that is both pragmatic and highly collaborative in order to maximise efficiency. We tap into data from production streams to get a strong idea of specific areas that require improvement.

Outside of my own team, I regularly engage with team members from different parts of the organisation, from quality control to engineering, development and others, to hear what they feel could be improved and consider their ideas on how to do so. None of our work can be done in isolation, and close collaboration with individuals across Sterling enables us to fully understand any limitations and opportunities for improvement. Sterling strongly values collaboration and partnership, and this is especially critical for process improvement.



## Fast Facts

### ROLE

Process Improvement Manager

### YEARS AT STERLING

5

### EDUCATION

PhD in Organic Chemistry, Newcastle University

### SPECIALISATIONS

Process improvement, development chemistry, organic synthesis, technology transfer, GMP, business development

In addition to our own organisation, we are continuously looking at the wider market to identify any new opportunities for improvement that could be advantageous. By considering what is occurring in the industry at large, we aim to identify top-of-mind concerns for our customers and better serve their needs.

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Ultimately, everything we do to improve processes is intended to benefit our customers, so their input is incredibly valuable. Whether this is through their direct input or by assessing their projects for further optimisation, we are committed to actively considering our customers' needs and programmes when developing strategies for improvement.

### How has the team worked to optimise processes across the business?

Our team aims to help Sterling operate as efficiently as possible, whether this is from a development and manufacturing standpoint or from a more general, organisation-wide perspective.

On the chemistry and manufacturing side, raw material utilisation is one area we often look for ways to improve, as raw materials can come with significant costs. In many processes, we've found opportunities to use less expensive alternatives, or to minimise the amount of raw material utilised. In addition, we regularly work on mitigating yield variability, increasing throughput, and optimising speed.

From an organisational point of view, we've done a lot of work to upgrade our core systems, strengthen continuity, and standardise data; all of which benefit our employees, our organisation and, in turn, our customers. We also look at things from an environmental standpoint, and we have implemented ways to help minimise the waste we produce. While a lot of our initiatives have taken place at Sterling's Northumberland headquarters, we are aggressively expanding process improvement work across our other Sterling facilities.

### How has the industry's focus on digitalisation factored into Sterling's process improvement objectives?

As I mentioned, I think it's really important to have a strong understanding of what's going on in the industry as we seek new opportunities for process improvement. Digitalisation is integral to bringing these opportunities to life. We see clear advantages

to digitalising and automating processes, and we have a number of plans in place to harness digital technologies more in our manufacturing processes and day-to-day workflows.

Some projects we have in progress include transitioning paper lab notebooks to a digital format, and strengthening integration among our systems to enhance data integrity and continuity. We also have plans for an on-site, third-party assessment that will enable us to continually identify additional opportunities for digitisation and automation. On top of that, Sterling has been working to bring new forms of automation to our manufacturing processes through efforts like continuous processing.

I find the data aspect particularly important, since the team's approach to process improvement is quite data-driven. Continuing to refine our big data strategy will greatly benefit our business and our customers by helping to inform process optimisation plans the team implements going forward.

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### How do you engage with customers in your role?

My role is very customer-centric, as all of our efforts ultimately aim to benefit our customers. We engage with customers in a variety of ways, and we regularly seek their input on potential opportunities for improvement. In addition, my experience working across various roles within the industry has given me a strong understanding of customers' needs and objectives across different parts of the project lifecycle, which is quite beneficial in my current position.

Sometimes, a customer will specifically request our aid in streamlining their processes. In these cases, we look closely at their particular projects and then present our ideas to them directly. Other times, we are looking more generally to improve runner and repeater processes, and customers benefit from the optimisation plans we put in place for these as well.

Process improvement enables us to build strong, lasting relationships with our customers. Our customers help us to focus the investments we make across different areas of the business, and we really value their input. At the end of the day, process improvement is inseparable from our focus on customer service and success.



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