

SEATING MATTERS 2020, BEING LEAN AND GENIUN IN CRISIS TIMES ¹

In the spring of 2020, Seating Matters, had worked to design a rapid-deployment bed for temporary field hospitals. They were making beds for use in temporary hospitals after coming up with a new design. There were excellent beds from bed companies. A simple medical bed in a flat pack, which can free up the more expensive beds for the patients who need them the most.

“As we see our healthcare workers battle against the Covid-19 virus, it’s important that companies like Seating Matters do whatever we can to provide the back up support they need.” Said Martina Tierney, Seating Matters cofounder.

Seating Matters

Seating Matters was a successful family owned company, started by Martina Tierney, an Occupational Therapist (OT) of over 30 years. The company was managed by Martina’s three sons Jonathan, Ryan, and Martin. The following video explains how they were able to change the organization and turn it into a benchmark of a company managed through the lean manufacturing principles.

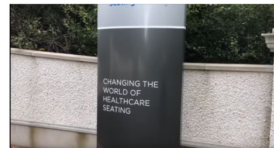


In the next video, Paul Akers explains his lean experience at Seating Matters.

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The case authors interviewed Martina, Martin, Ryan, and part of the staff of Seating Matters, to have a better understanding of the company and their lean transformation, and the reaction that they have had with the coronavirus crisis.

About Seating Matters, Martina explained:

Throughout my 30-year career, I have worked in acute and community care, nursing homes and rehab, specializing in clinical seating provision. During my time working with patients, I discovered the profound effects unsafe seating could have on patient outcomes and struggled to find chairs which met their clinical and functional needs. After outlining the different features my patients required, including pressure care and easy adjustability, I set the goal to change the world of healthcare seating, by designing therapeutic chairs that would meet needs of bed-bound and low mobility patients. Seating Matters began when my husband, James, an Engineer, designed custom chairs to meet the needs of my individual patients. Our passion was to solve seating problems to support other clinicians who were experiencing the same challenges as myself and families. Our 3 sons, Jonathan, Ryan, and Martin could see that there was a need for these chairs globally and that other patients could massively benefit, not just my own. In 2008, we set out to create chairs that would cater to the holistic needs of patients - providing comfort, postural support, pressure management and improving quality of life. We take pride in being at the forefront of seating research and innovation and want to share our knowledge to ensure no person must face unnecessary discomfort or mortality.

Seating Matters company overview

Martina introduced us Martin her youngest son.

Martin, tell us a little bit about, what do you do here at Seating Matters and about the company in general.

- *Well, Seating Matters is very much a family business. So, our entire family work together in it. If we go way back to the start, how it began is my mother is an occupational therapist. So, she was getting equipment for patients with complex disabilities. And she needed chairs made exact for these people. My father crafted a chair for one individual person. And then made a second, and a third. And my brothers and I thought, hey, there is a business here. There are more people that need these chairs than just our mother and her patients.*

How old were you at that point?

- *We were 17, 18, and 19 years old at that point. I have a sister who's 10 years younger, so she was seven. Today she works with us closely as well. But way back then, we were very young, and we said, "Look, there's a business here. There's more people that need our help than just our mother's patients." We designed a range of chairs and started to promote and to provide them into care facilities, into hospitals, to patients with disabilities living at home.*

Mostly here in Northern Ireland at that time?

- *For the first year, we focused on Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. And then we began to provide chairs in the UK. And now, currently we provide our chairs in Australia, in New Zealand, in the UK, Ireland, Canada, the States, and quite a few chairs to the VA in the USA (Veterans Health Administration) So we're very proud and very happy to be able to provide our seating that our family have created to veterans who have served in the army, and the navy, and the air force, and all the forces in the States.*

Were you literally like teenagers running a company?

- *Yes, very much so. We did not have a clue. And maybe we still do not. We are figuring some things out along the way. But really, it was starting from scratch here. None of us here went to business school, none of us here are experts in anything, from an educational perspective. So, anything we have done, we have learned it ourselves. I mean, we had good teachers in our parents. Our mother from a clinical side, our father from a work ethic and from a business perspective. But in terms of designing products, of running a factory, of a distribution network across the world, of getting and solving complex problems in hospitals and long-term care facilities, we figured a lot of that out ourselves.*

Your dad came up with this idea, builds some prototypes. Then how did this come to be?

- *Our father had his own business. He was doing construction. And our mother had her own business doing assessments for patients with disabilities. The manufacturing, Seating Matters, the design, the clinical research that we have carried out in our chairs, is really happened then within the last 10 years, here at Seating Matters. We made a range of products, a range of seven chairs, for adults, for children, and for bariatric patients. And then we then divided the business kind of into two streams. Traditionally we were very custom, very specialized chairs crafted for an individual person. So very bespoke and custom to an individual's needs. And now we have been able to take that learning and that research, that level of quality and that level of adjustability within a chair, and to make that to a very accessible chair, a universal chair that we're providing to hospitals all over the world. We named it the Milano chair.*