

## EMERGING LEADER

ESTEFANI GIL, UTILITY COORDINATOR AT PRESIDENT CONTAINER GROUP | WITH HV MFG STAFF

# UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES PAY OFF

Estefani “Stef” Gil is a utility coordinator at President Container Group (PCG), a manufacturer of corrugated boxes and point of purchase displays located in Middletown, NY. Born in the Virgin Islands on the island of St. Croix, Stef became a police officer in St. Croix after graduating high school and attending college in the United States. She then began the lengthy process of applying for homeland security and moved to New York. While waiting to hear the results of her application, Stef took a temporary position at PCG. Now, she has excelled in her position at the company, becoming a leader and developing strong rapport with her crew. Stef describes her journey at PCG and the practical, positive attitude that had led her to success.

**HV Mfg:** Thanks for speaking with us, Stef! We’re excited to learn more about your story. Firstly, what is your role at PCG and can you describe your responsibilities?

**E.G.:** Thank you! I am the utility coordinator. We’re pretty much a sub-department to tooling. My position was created for me and with the responsibility of having this role came building a department from the bottom up. I created job descriptions, employee evaluations, and training methods.

Right now, I have a very small department. I trained each of them myself, and now they help me with training other hires. We are responsible for maintaining tooling in the machine center. I make sure that they’re checking the tools that we use to run the jobs at the machines, and that they’re helping the crew members set up the jobs correctly for the corresponding customers.

Aside from that, I maintain employee evaluation review folders, and I am assigned to a few projects in tooling and with the continuous improvement (CI) department.



Utility Coordinator Estefani Gil at the EVOL 100 Pre-feeder.

**HV Mfg:** How did you come to work at PCG?

**E.G.:** I found this job online. I was just looking for something to keep me busy while I transitioned from local law enforcement to federal law enforcement. Never did I think I would be working in the manufacturing business.

I remember the first day, dressed for orientation, we toured the plant. I was shocked when I went to the floor for the first time. If I'm being honest, it was culture shock, but in the work environment.

It was hard at first because it wasn't my passion, and I missed my job. I wasn't sure if it would be rewarding, but I'm the type of person that will do my best, no matter what. I take every job seriously. I'm going to give it the same energy as something I love. My dad always said it's important to learn everything someone is willing to teach you. You have to be open to learning a little bit of everything because you never really know where you're going to end up.

**HV Mfg:** It sounds like manufacturing was a new experience and a challenge initially. How did you become acclimated to your new working environment?

**E.G.:** I started in the ink kitchen, making the ink, checking viscosity, pH, and all of these things that were new to me. I became fascinated by it and became more and more interested.

Believe it or not, I learned to appreciate a box. Everything needs a box. It's amazing, the different types of things that we need a box for, and the amount of work that it takes for that final product to be put out there. We have people here who take a lot of pride in their work and they make it all happen. So that motivated me to the point that when they offered me a permanent job position, I wasn't even skeptical about it. I didn't hesitate to answer.

I started falling in love with every single procedure, starting with ink, then templates, then dye clouds. When I had the opportunity to go out on the plant floor to a machine center and see what comes out, and see how these tools work, I saw and appreciated what's made here so much more. And I've never seen a pizza box the same since!

**HV Mfg:** How were you able to advance your role in the company?

**E.G.:** Slowly, I started to feel more settled as I learned all the details of the work. If I'm going to spend 10 hours a day here, I'd like everything to be in its spot, so I can find it later! I know it's difficult, because everyone has their own pattern and routine, but I started to find a groove with the ink and how I could organize the workspace.

At our machine centers every job has its own challenges. We would have issues with machines being down for long periods of time. That's where my utility crew comes in—we help avoid the downtime. We get the tooling at the machine center and inspect it to make sure we're the extra set of eyes before the job starts running. We set up the job to make sure the tooling is in good



Utility Coordinator Estefani Gil with utility member Eduardo Corrales checking the line at the EVOL 115 machine center.

running condition, so that whenever the next job comes up, the machines keep running.

My supervisors moved me from the tooling department and put me at the Gopfert, my first machine. They gave me a notebook and a pen. And they told me to take notes, shadow this person, learn as much as you can. I was nervous, because we were getting right into it. There's this new die cutter with six printers and here I am, just a girl with a notebook.

It was challenging because I didn't really have anybody to teach me exactly what I had to do. So, I had to ask a lot of questions. They let me shadow them, I was there for three weeks, and I was already setting up jobs. They were impressed with how quickly I learned everything. Now, I oversee four crew members—my “guys.”

**HV Mfg:** What has the leadership element of your position been like?

**E.G.:** It's been going really well so far. I've had other leadership positions prior to working here, so I take a lot of what I learned in my last job and apply it here. Having empathy, knowing that you have to be fair and equitable, lead by example, and build confidence in my crew. I motivate them when they need motivation and encourage them when they feel like they're not doing good enough.

As a leader, I like putting myself out on the floor, working along with them, even if it means leaving here covered in dust and ink. It happens all the time and it doesn't matter to me. Most importantly, recognizing the good work that the guys do out there. And telling them that I appreciate the fact that they take pride in what they do. They do an awesome job and they have a great work ethic.

I always tell my crew that it's okay not to know the answer but it's important to take the initiative to find out. Never be scared to ask a question. There's no dumb question and every question has an answer.





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Utility Coordinator Estefani Gil with utility member Gabriel Gomez pre-setting a die cut for the next job at the GOPFERT machine center.

**HV Mfg:** You recently completed the Council of Industry's Certificate in Manufacturing Leadership program. Has it impacted your leadership style?

**E.G.:** Most definitely. Right after every class, I'd ask myself, "How am I going to apply this?" The next day at work, I would use the lessons I learned. Things like knowing how to talk to an employee or correct them when they need some direction. We have to watch our tone, our body language, how we approach people, and how we handle certain situations.

The DiSC profile was a nice opportunity to learn how to deal with every type of personality. After that class, I could interact with people and see the way they react to certain things and have a better understanding of how to approach them. I really liked that, because one of the biggest things that a lot of us fail to understand as leaders is that not everyone's going to think like us. Everyone's different. I realized that a lot of the supervisors in my class have their own ways of leading and their own styles of how they run their departments.

The course helped me organize my department, especially while I was still figuring out how to run it and set it up. It helped me prioritize the projects that I had and set deadlines for and to create an action plan.

**HV Mfg:** How are you able to maintain such a positive attitude in the workplace?

E.G.: I've learned that it doesn't matter where you work, it makes no sense to complain and get discouraged about something that you don't want to do if you're not going to change something about it yourself. If you're going to complain, you need to have a plan.

I come to work every day, even if I'm having a hard day in my personal life, or it's challenging, or I'm overwhelmed, I simply get up and do as much as I can. It doesn't matter how the day goes; I still give it my best.

**HV Mfg:** Tell us about your law enforcement experience prior to working at PCG.

E.G.: The police academy was mentally challenging. They break you and they build you back. They break you emotionally, physically, and mentally. On my first PT test, I couldn't do one push up. That's when I realized I needed to work. Every free minute, I would be doing pushups. And eventually I graduated as the top female officer of my class in 2019. I was also top female firearm, top female physical fitness, and top female academics, and received the post award. The post award granted me first selection after my one-year probation.

After the academy, I worked patrol. I was being trained as a firearm instructor and I knew I wanted to do more so I gained

"Learn from everything." "Never say no to learning something new and be willing and do your best."

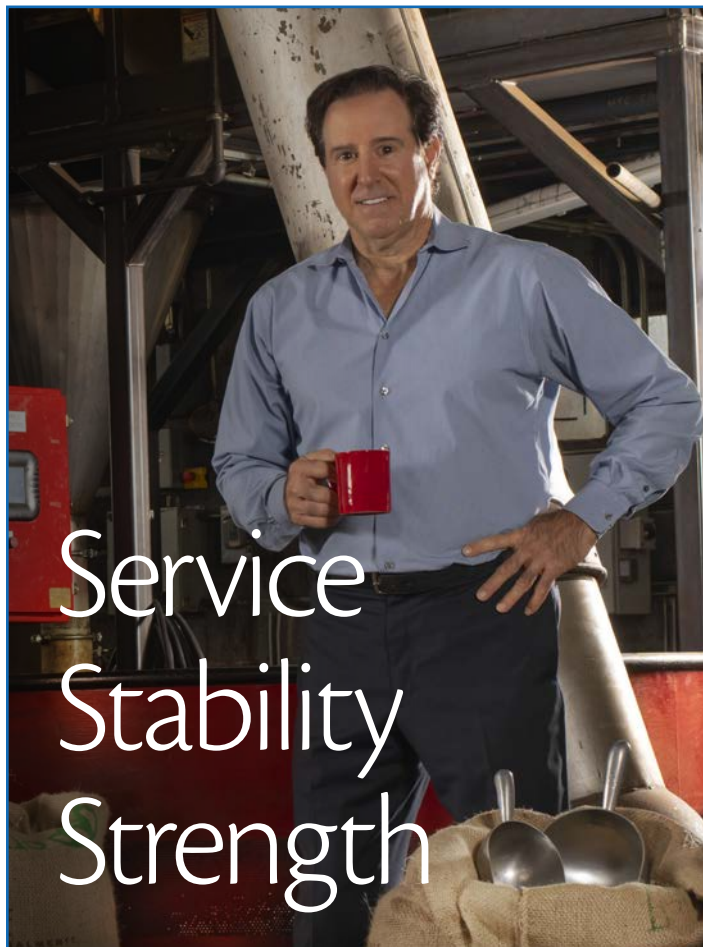
some experience and researched how to apply for homeland security. It is a very long process, you have to get top security clearance, background investigation, mental and physical evaluations, and more. I came to New York while I awaited background clearance for homeland security.

**HV Mfg:** What is your relationship with your crew like?

E.G.: A lot of the time, they come in here and they are going through so much in their personal lives. My job as a leader is to make sure that when they're here they know that I care about what they're going through. One thing I like to do—and I practice this a lot—is never telling them what to do. I ask them to do things, because I feel it's respectful. When I ask them instead of telling them, they feel good. And when I see that, I feel better. And it feels like I'm doing something right. We get along very well, and we have a good working relationship. That to me is very rewarding.

**HV Mfg:** What's your advice for those struggling to find their career in manufacturing?

E.G.: Learn from everything. If you're new to manufacturing, be patient with yourself. It can be overwhelming when you walk



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into a place where everyone knows what everything is. Take a lot of notes and take pride in doing your research and asking questions.

Never say no to learning something new and be willing and do your best, even if it's just a temporary position. A lot of people talk about how expensive formal education is, but learning is free when someone's willing to teach you. Don't be scared.

**HV Mfg:** What are your future plans at PCG?

**E.G.:** I like to think that I have a very bright future here at PCG. And it's because of the support I have from my superiors. I feel like every day, they set me up for something bigger. I take a lot of interest in the tooling department; I love everything tooling. And I'm interested in the continuous improvement department. If I'm here in the long term, I would love to be more involved and continue to learn and grow.

**HV Mfg:** It's been incredibly inspiring to hear your story. Do you have any closing remarks for fellow manufacturers or those looking to break into the field?

**E.G.:** When we come to work, we always have to remember why we're here. We are the people who are behind the scenes, putting smiles on the faces of those customers. Always be positive and just remember why we're here. Even on the days when it's hard.

**HV Mfg:** Thank you so much for sharing your story with HV Mfg.

**E.G.:** I'm really glad we were able to do this. Thank you!



Utility Coordinator Estefani Gil pre-setting a print plate for the next job at the EVOL 115 machine center.

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