

Casual Glance? or Do you Look and See and Observe?

Let us face it, the game has changed. The current economic situation has changed the face of business whether in a positive or negative sense. This has forced Leaders to do more with less forcing our minds to be more focused in the game than ever before. But, have you taken the time to observe the “game” to recognize if the game is truly leveraging your gift of time and your talent management members?

One of my more favourable tasks when working with organizations is taking the time to walk with team members through the Value Stream doing what I have classified as a “waste walk”. For just a few moments we are able to extract folks from playing within the game to observe the game ... sometimes the results are depressing to the team ... but always we end the walk rich with opportunities.

The following are some general observations we repeatedly see during our walks. First, before we start. Let us get grounded with some basic assumptions:

People are naturally lazy ... This is not necessarily a bad thing ... we just need to understand this basic human trait and how to take advantage of it. Folks are very smart and inherently will always seek the easiest path of performing a functions. We are innovative in our ability to find short-cuts ... so if they are effective how can we leverage the techniques for others to use?

People want to do a good job ... as you conduct your walk, look in drawers, cabinets and toolboxes ... what do you see? Are their opportunities through improved process to reduce inventory? I can guarantee that you have a complete hidden “stores” facility located in people’s personal storage locations ... whether it is tools or parts, folks will horde whatever it takes to do a good job innocently.

People are Social Creatures ... they like to talk and communicate ... but are they communicating the correct things? This brings us to a guiding principal ... how are you getting the materials into the hands of your Team members without invading their work areas? Every time you invade an employees work area you create an interruption. This interruption creates an opportunity for conversation. Studies have shown that every time an employee is distracted it takes the employee about 20 minutes to gain back focus to the task they were working on. This is a big productivity waste r that is frequently overlooked by the casual observer.

As you enter the process what do you immediately observe? Is process flow evident? Can you see the status of each operation? Are the employees Safe, Clean, Comfortable and well informed ? As Process experts we tend to look at the process within a specific task to insure That we have optimum performance but how often have we looked at the transfer of Information, communication and materials? Does it operate to a specific cadence established within the organization or have we Allowed a cadence to be informally adopted with the Value Stream? Remember, folks will find their own pace to do work Unless performance targets have been established or Takt time.

Observe your conveyence methodologies ... which at best are 50% efficient ... even walking a document to another person’s Desk the employee must return to their work-station empty-handed.

Where Lean Thoughts can become Reality

“Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow.”

Ronald. E. Osborn

Waste Walks

Are the aisles clear and uncluttered or have you designed an obstacle course? We always are looking for “**Talking Floors**”. The floors should be speaking to you and the balance of the organization telling where and what kind of stuff should be located where and in what quantity. Space always seems to be an issue so if an open space appears material conveyance employees will pounce on the opportunity to cover it, or optimize it. If you do not have Talking floors you and the organization will be prone to developing a non-Value Add core competency called ... moving stuff around ... something I am certain customers are not willing to pay for.

Where are **parts and supplies located** and how? Are employees exercising excessive motion to retrieve parts, forms and information or can you do a simple lay-out adjustment to make access easier? In many cases, we store items in part number sequence rather than based on consumption rate. Also in many cases once we have an area organized we are afraid to return for review and potential re-adjustment.

Inventory levels at Point of Use quite frequently have been established by default, based on the size of the storage container. Hopefully, your organization employs the use of a **Plan For Every Part (PFEP)** data base. This tool is the touch-stone that will allow you to calculate with accuracy the size of your supermarkets and determine the quantity required at your Point of Use (POU) locations based on your replenishment rates.

Sometimes conducting your waste walk near the **end of shift** will reveal some additional opportunities. Most organizations allow employees time to clean their workstations and areas. Has “clean” been defined? In most cases clean has been verbally communicated to employees to be translated in their own interpretation. **Clean needs be clearly defined, timed and documented.** The cleaning operation needs to not only support the ecstatic view of your operation but should also support the criteria of your Total Productive Maintenance program to insure that processes will remain predictable, reliable and robust.

Do you allow your employees to use **compressed air to clean**? This is not cleaning! All compressed air does is move the debris to another location or even atomize the dust into the air where it will settle to other areas which potentially could encumber processes later on. The only benefit of using compressed air to clean is that the dust will settle on parts and machines which can then be used as a visual indicator of how stagnant your inventory flow may be.

Finally, observe to see how are folks leaving their workstations at the end of shift? Are the workstations clean and devoid of parts or is the station populated and ready for immediate employee engagement when they return to work the following day or for the incoming shift? We call this **leaving the work area “wet”** so that our folks can be immediately productive when they return to their work station. This is counter-intuitive to folks which is also a subliminal productivity robber. Add up the minutes ... 5 minutes to clean the area and then 5-15 minutes to get the area ready for production ... is 10 to 25 minute daily productivity loss or 2-5%. When you consider that Jay Meyers from CME estimated that the break-even of an operation is about 7 hours and 56 minutes within an 8 hour shift this is can be significant to your operation.

Have fun with your observations and create some improvements at no or little expense. Just remember, sometimes it is better to **go slow in order to go faster**