



WORKINGSMARTER

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Continually create new standards

One foundational tool in the world of companies practicing Lean management is called a *Standard Work*. That is the name given to a written procedure illustrating the current steps to complete a task or operation.

Keep in mind that I used the words “current steps” in this explanation. You may be thinking you already have this issue under control because you have a procedures manual — a 2-in.-thick, three-ring binder packed full of all of the procedures at your company. I would like to illustrate the differences between your binder of procedures and a Standard Work.

MONTHLY CHALLENGE

Select a key process for which you may already have a procedure written. Give it to the crew with the instructions, “Try this process, and then come back with ideas on how you think you can improve upon it.”

Standards change

Far too many times, I have watched franchise organizations treat their procedures manual as though the contents were carved into two stone tablets sent down from on high. By contrast, the best franchises use their procedures manuals as guides and foundation documents, allowing

their franchisees to suggest changes that improve their contents.

Recently, I came across a company that locked some of their managers in a room off and on for a year and paid an expensive consultant to help them write out exactly how every process in the company was done. They then took their perceived masterpiece and put it on the company intranet for everyone to worship and follow — or else. The result? A frustrated management team, because the company’s employees would not go to the intranet and use it.

What’s wrong

First off, procedures cannot be written in a room from memory, because memories are inaccurate.

Secondly, when we tell the team, “Here are the great procedures we wrote for you to follow,” we’re actually sending them a different message. It seems as though we’re telling them: “We don’t believe you’re smart enough to think for yourselves, so the smart people in the company got together and wrote all of this up, just for you.”

My favorite procedures manual story is one of a landscape contractor who hired a \$50,000 employee just to follow him around and capture in writing all of the company’s procedures — from pushing papers in the office to setting the base timbers on a wall — and he was going to tell her what to write. It did not occur to me at the time, but think about the ego this person must have had. Did they get it done? Yes! Did anyone use it? No! Final result: a bruised ego.

A better way

Now I know these examples are extreme, and chances are the binder you have is at least looked at in the spring when the new employees come around. I hope you will now connect with the essence of a Standard Work and why companies that work smarter value this tool.

Remember the words “current steps” used earlier? The main function of the Standard Work is to be a guide that allows employees to continually improve upon what they are doing, and then documenting it with the expectations that it will be improved yet again in the future. It is this expectation of continuous improvement that makes Lean so effective. When you begin to dust off the procedures manual and challenge your team with improving key processes, you are on your way to working smarter.

More than 250 Green Industry companies have participated in JP Horizons’ Working Smarter Training Challenge (WSTC), typically saving tens of thousands of dollars annually. To learn whether your organization qualifies to participate in the WSTC, visit www.jphorizons.com today.