



WORKINGSMARTER

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Take 5 steps toward lasting change

One common Lean tool to making changes and taking action is a simple, but effective process called 5S. It is effective because it provides a plan to accomplishing something that is visual to everyone. In most cases, it also creates immediate efficiencies and improvements.

5S can take place in the maintenance bay, the design office, or through the computer files — and will help in shaping the culture of your company to move from just talking about changes to making them. The following is a brief description of 5S methodology:

1. Sort: Select an area, then begin to systematically evaluate what should be in that area and what should not be. It might mean you need to go through the “painful” experience of throwing away that old transmission you bought at an auction 12 years ago that your maintenance crew has to step over every time they need to get the backpack blower hanging behind it on the wall. After all, when in doubt, throw it out!

2. Shine: Get out the mops, buckets, cleaning utensils and go to work. Clean everything in the area in which you are focusing. Don’t just dust; how about some new paint on the walls and the floor? Spray off the tools and equipment that will be stored in this area. Be careful not to try and clean the entire world, just stay focused on the area you have selected.

3. Set in order: When you are ready to put back only the things that belong in that area, first add some shelves, hooks or designated space on the floor to park equipment. Give thought to what should be placed where, based on making it effi-

cient to locate and easy to access.

Let me offer a quick note here for all of us who have instinctively used the first three steps described above only to find that in time, the area in which we put all that effort eventually returned back to the way it used to be. This process has more to it than just cleaning; it must become a mindset that shapes the culture of your company. That is why the next two steps are essential.

4. Standardize: The easiest way to accomplish this is through labeling and creating some structure to the area of your focus. When a designated label clearly reads “rake,” it becomes more difficult to place the shovel there. Show faith in your team or yourself as a leader. Try it, and your team will amaze you.

5. Sustain: This step is what separates your efforts from “just cleaning something” to an evolving culture of efficiency and Working Smarter. Keep in mind that the project is not completed until you have put up some visual reminders and tracking that will maintain and continue to improve what you have accomplished in this area. Post a simple map that shows where everything is to be stored, and use an auditing system that consistently measures and evaluates how well everyone is adhering to the new standard that has been established.

Making changes, even simple ones, often can be uncomfortable, seemingly time-consuming and can challenge the current state of your company. Yet on the other side of the change, success is waiting patiently. What if a mind shift and a great 5S project could help your company add 10% more billable hours in 2009, or add 3% improvement to client retention? When the correlation between making changes and noticeable and measurable improvements is realized, a culture shift to continuous improvement takes place.

MONTHLY CHALLENGE

Choose an area in your company to “5S.” Make sure it is manageable and try and work through each of the steps.

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 see if your organization qualifies to participate in the WSTC, visit www.jp horizons.com today.