**Understandability is the Key to Sustainability**

As mentioned in last month’s introductory article, there are several methods to improve operations in a printing company, lean and constraint management. Both involve terms and methods that need to be readily understood to make initial improvements and to make those improvements a normal part of day-to-day processes/activities.

Not only that, but the concepts and their strengths and weaknesses need to be clearly understood so that strong improvement ideas can be generated to solve the process issues that face the company. If team members feel they are less educated or less informed about the various tools that can be used, they are less likely to offer solutions as they are afraid of looking stupid.

So highly specialized terms or phrases need to be replaced with things people understand as they are part of their normal life. Phrases/words like the following create barriers:

* Reduction of variability – replace with “reliability”
* Kaizen – replace with “improvement event”
* Muda, mura – replace with “wasted effort”
* Poka Yoke – replace with “preventing quality problems”
* 5S – replace with “an organized work area”
* And all of the other Japanese words virtually no American knows

I think it can be summarized quite simply: What are the odds the Japanese use English terms at Toyota in Japan? They use Japanese because that is the language they speak there. And if the case is to make it complex, why not use terms in Navajo?

Maybe you can teach a core group of people these terms in a foreign language. But then put in a little turnover in the workforce and sustainability starts to weaken. You eventually need to move beyond educating on terminology. You need to get stuff done.

Consultants like to use the terms because it shows they know more than you and they can waste your time and money getting you to understand these terms. All under the guise of this is your “lean journey”. The REAL journey is to improve effectively and efficiently. Wasting time by teaching a new language just gets in the way.

*So other than speaking simple English, how do we get traction and sustainability?*

Practical education, coaching, repetition, and application of terms are the starting points. Reinforcing the terms through their application in the business is essential because you have moved beyond talking about things to actually seeing things in action. Seeing something makes it real.

Full day or even half day training sessions (some are even longer!) result in breakdowns in learning, less retention, and boredom. Make the learning interactive, short, and applied. After a concept is covered, have a work assignment for each person that actually improves the company in a meaningful way. No “feel good” initiatives as your people will see through these immediately. They will be thinking, “OMG, I thought this could be a waste of time. And I was right.” Get rid of the apprehension by making the concept that was taught a reality.

One simple example is to teach about “wait time” in a process. Teach the concept (it is one of the seven wastes) and then have people go back to their work area and look for it, document what they see and estimate its impact on the timing of the delivery of the process’s outputs. This “wait time” happens in all processes, office, shop, with suppliers and customers. Make the term “wait time” really mean something. Applied learning.

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**About the Author:** Bob Krausert is the owner of STRATE***X***, a Twin Cities based firm that works nationwide. Bob is the author of the book, Extreme Lean, published in 2018. Bob has worked with over 60 printing companies, mostly mid-sized companies, but also with larger companies like Jostens and RR Donnelly. During his career, Bob has trained over 12,000 people at both public and private events. Bob has been working with PIM since 2010, periodically providing educational seminars for its members. Bob can be reached at stratexlean20@gmail.com or by phone at 612-743-8706. If you would like to have a specific question or topic covered in one of the monthly articles, feel free to make the suggestion!