



The Kaizen Benefit

Abstract

While many methods are used to implement Lean, one of the most popular is a Kaizen Event. These Events are focused workshops to identify and implement low cost, high impact improvements. Using the several principles of 5S, Lean and Ergonomics, Events combine training, analysis, and real-time changes using employee teams to deliver immediate business value and employee safety.

Overview

Kaizen, an integral part of the Lean Production philosophy, is a Japanese word that to make employees jobs easier by studying them and making little improvements. The intent is to make jobs safer and more efficient by improving the working environment and the focus is immediate action rather than longer-term alternatives to change. Kaizen literally means “*good change*.”

Improvement begins with the belief that every organization has opportunities for change and improvement. The traditional wisdom holds that “If it isn’t broke, don’t fix it.” However, the Kaizen philosophy takes the view that every process can be improved and therefore even if you think “It isn’t broke, fix it anyway.”

The best knowledge resides with the operators who actually perform the work. They know the problems and often the solutions. During a Kaizen event, small teams of operators and maintenance employees make the recommendations on how to improve the process as well as then make the physical changes to the processes. These teams support and continue the process after the event is over.

Because operators know the process, work the process, and are involved in the change process, there is tremendous buy-in and ownership of all improvements. Changes created through the Kaizen Event are very sustainable. The processes rarely revert back to the less safe and less efficient way of doing things.

One of the Key concepts of a Kaizen Event is that “***If there is No Action, there can be No Success.***” The goal is not a 100% solution that solves all the problems at one time, rather a 70% solution that can be accomplished in a few days with the intent to hold another event in several months that further improves the processes. The improvement does have to be perfect the first time, rather is the process better today than it was the day before. During Events, strive for “base hits,” not “home runs” with a “no idea being a bad idea” philosophy. Look for ways to make it happen.



Quick, simple and low-cost is better than slow, complicated and expensive. Utilize what exists in the facility (and forgotten storage areas) or off the shelf purchases to implement the new improvement quickly. A Kaizen Event is not a license to spend and improvements should be accomplished with very little expenditure. The essence of a Kaizen Event is making improvements with what you have – use existing tools, machines, materials, space, etc. Overall emphasis is placed on creating solutions and improvements with existing assets. As a result, Kaizen Events are a very cost-effective method to create dramatic improvements in processes.

A typical Kaizen event is three to five days long, comprised of a cross-functional team usually with 12 to 15 employees. The team is composed of people who are in the process to be reviewed, such as the lead operators, and supervisors. Additional resources from other departments such as maintenance and safety are assigned to support the event. Even personnel from local vendors/suppliers can be included.

In a nutshell, the process is simple but needs significant coordination. Training is completed the first morning in the classroom. In the afternoon, the tools that were taught are applied on the shop floor, with more emphasis on issue identification. Reports are made several times each day to the group and other teams to exchange ideas, keep teams posted on progress, resolve issues and seek additional resources such as an electrician. Teams are empowered to identify and improve their identified work areas. Once teams find enough improvement items, they start implementing the changes. The scope of the Event is to be able to complete the changes and have the new improved process up and running by the morning of the last day. All improvements must be measured for impact and verified to ensure additional issues are not created. Improvements are generally summarized in a PowerPoint presentation and shared to the other teams and management on the last day. Communication plans are discussed and executed, so when operators come in on the next shift, the new processes are in place. People understand what improvements were made, why and how to safely operate equipment and tools within the new process.

Summary

Without the belief and support that your organization has improvement opportunities, you may deny a valid and beneficial employee-driven process. A Kaizen Event is a simple, effective and powerful approach to problem-solving, cultural change, and team building. When combined with your Lean initiative, Kaizen Events drive accelerated workplace changes that improve productivity and workplace safety.

Additional Information

For more information about ergonomics products and services, contact Risk Management Group at info@riskgroup-llc.com or call Jeff Smagacz at 615.289.4479.