Lean Thoughts

Why LEAN?

You or your organization has identified a product or service that the world needs. Initially you put in countless hours and tons of energy to develop and deliver your product or service … but what was missing? … money, but you have created a process.

As the demand increases you have added people and maybe moved to a larger location but remained was the initial process. Along comes a consultant and he encourages you to adopt LEAN Methodologies .. What should you do?

Lean is not a cost reduction exercise.

Lean is about increasing velocity within your process and a result should also be enhancing your brand image.

Most organizations start and often stop with the implementation of 5S and consider that they have implemented LEAN but in actual fact they have just completed a huge house cleaning exercise.

5S is a lot about building the brand … your brand. Consider what kind of professional image you want your organization to project. Articulate this into quantifiable requirements such as colour, font size and my favorite the "No Tape" rule where you will no longer accept people to tape reminders written on plain paper to your walls, doors or work stations.

The environment surrounding your process should be inviting, professional and respectful. This will engage your employees to act professionally and make them proud to be part of the team. Indeed sublimely, an employee that enters a work area that is not professionally looking will immediately react that professional standards are not required so your product or service becomes sub-par and ultimately your customer will see this and will no longer be able to define the value you are attempting to sell.

As you build your brand image it reflects the respect that your people and your process deserve. However, as you implement your 5S strategy look at how your workplace organization will reduce walk and repetitive reach … 2 steps is 5 feet and 30 inches of reach is .6 seconds this elimination starts to …

Open Capacity … indeed the adoption of Lean Methodology Is primarily about opening capacity. Particularly if you approach your 5S implementation with "eyes for flow" and "eyes for waste". Most organizations are focused that cost reductions equate to less head count but in most instances adding people or re-allocating your resources will significantly improve process velocity enhancing customer delight and it could even become a significant differenator for your business.

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

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Designing Delivery Routes

We recently were exposed to a very large RV dealership where the employees always blamed the OEM for poor quality and the response to any customer was 2 weeks … because that was perceived as the industry standard. With minor process modifications they could dramatically improve throughput velocity and most like exponentially increase business … but when they are making so much money there is no burning platform to spur change.

If you do not have a burning platform to stimulate change (if you have one … it is most likely too late to change) then create one for your organization to latch onto. Sometimes the vision may not be immediately visible but as you progress the Vision will clarify.

Focus on velocity and the various Lean Methodologies will rapidly make sense but very important is that you constantly provide respect for your people and provide constant feed-back.

Hourly run boards stimulate the competitiveness within each employee as they strive to meet the hourly target or even exceed it. Respect for the process is to have your Daily Management Report-Out so employees can share Disturbances to Flow experienced during the past 24 hours and express any concerns potentially to be faced in the coming 24 hours.

Quickly as we work with any organization we are asked to focus on scheduling … and here is why we love KanBan so much. Kanban provides a visual authorization to: Produce, Replenish, or Retrieve. So we typically implement a 2 part Kanban one at the finished goods level that the fuels our Production Kanban. Typically we see a 30% reduction in finished goods inventory while improving machine uptime. Why? Because employees who do the process, know the process and can optimize the process .. So in the adage of … Lead, Follow or Get out of the way … we build a process system and get out of the way.

Of course Reflections are mandatory for success. Whether they are doing in real time (Supervisors) Daily (Management Report-Outs) or monthly (4 month … Check, Do, Act Plan). This is where the richness of enhancing your Lean Deployment comes from. Many focus on the implementation and forget to take time to get "ON" the business because it seems like to much fun being "IN" the business.

Finally an effective Lean Program comes with lots and lots of check-lists and the employments of many white boards. The checklists are necessary since they act as alarm clocks for your employees to wake up if something is not correct and rectify the situation … very much like error proofing a process.

White Boards … because employees like to give real time feed-back which they trust and believe in more than any computer generated metric provided to them.

Ultimately Lean is a reflection of your Business … how do you stack up?

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