

# Improvement Initiatives

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FREE NEWSLETTER

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*"Hope is a desire with an expectation of accomplishment."*

## Here's Help ... No Matter What Improvement Methodology Is Changing Your Life

by Jeff Hajek

The information available on the VELACTION website isn't just about Lean. It is really about all forms of continuous improvement; Lean is just the most widely used method. Other approaches include the Toyota ® Production System (TPS), Six Sigma ®, Just-in-Time (JIT) manufacturing, agile manufacturing, Theory of Constraints (TOC), flow production, and countless other internally developed systems.

These methods have some significant differences, but they still share many common traits, tools, and techniques. Each is used for solving problems and each causes changes in employees' lives.

### Why Lean?

In order for a company to stay in business, it must be profitable. There are many ways to increase earnings, but time and time again Lean has proven to be one of the most effective ways to make quality better, deliver products faster, and reduce costs (QDC).

Because it delivers powerful results, nearly 70%\* of all U.S. Manufacturing companies are using some form of Lean. Lean is also making substantial inroads into administrative areas, the retail sector, and health care to name a few. If it didn't work, it wouldn't have the staying power that it has shown.

[continued on next page](#)

## Respect People: Put Safety First

by Jon Miller

When you think about it, makes you wonder at the subtle genius of Toyota's simplification of their operating system as "kaizen and respect for people." The whole system is based on mutual respect.

Practically everything else is an entailment.

**Safety first** is the obvious one. In addition to being a good idea from a

PR standpoint, the unwanted scrutiny of federal and local agencies, and for avoiding direct costs such as lost time and insurance premiums, having a safe workplace is merely the humane thing to do. But to place safety first and take it seriously as such requires deep commitment. A surprising number of people who think they put safety first in fact do not, in my experience.

This is a question of mistaking the ...

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## Jay vs. the Gecko

"both can save you 15% ..."



**Jay Watson** is a freelance operational excellence advocate, management coach, and technology writer who promotes continuous improvement events and related web sites.

The founding editor of [www.freeleansite.com](http://www.freeleansite.com) - a free lean site devoted to waste identification and cost savings – whose techniques can typically save a manufacturing organization 15% of operating costs through the steadfast and systematic application of six sigma and lean management. *The Geico gecko is a talking amphibian that can save you money on car insurance.*

### What's that ?



Geico

That's the money you could be saving with Geico Jay !!

### Here's Help ... (continued from page 1)

Companies are always looking for a way to increase their competitive edge in the face of the pressures of today's marketplace. Lean fits the bill.

How do Lean principles help increase the bottom line? Essentially by helping a business "do more with less." With commitment to a continuous improvement culture, companies can produce higher quality products and provide better service—all in a shorter period of time, while using fewer materials and resources.

The goal of streamlining procedures is ultimately to create a customer centered organization. This means that every step in every process should not only be efficient, but should be beneficial to the customer. Anything that doesn't add value to the customer is considered waste - a term that you will hear when you travel in Lean circles.

Lean Thinking is based on the philosophy that everyone in the company makes

constant, incremental changes every day in order to improve their job. To do that, they need to have the right skills. Velaction has a number of solutions to make Lean more effective for managers and their teams.

\* Blanchard, David. "Census of U.S. Manufacturers—Lean Green & Low Cost." *Industry Week*, Oct 1, 2007

### About The Author

Jeff Hajek, MBA, author of the [Lean book, Whaddaya Mean I Gotta Be Lean?](#), is a Master Black Belt, a continuous improvement expert, and a leading authority on managing change at the front line. Jeff is a successful author, speaker, and entrepreneur. In addition to earning his MBA, he also holds a degree in Mechanical Engineering with a concentration in Aerospace from the United States Military Academy at West Point.

He is the founder of Velaction—a training and publishing company dedicated to making continuous improvement easier, more effective, and more rewarding for managers and their teams.

## Improvement: Big or Small, Do It All !

by Jay Watson

Identify and consider all sides of an issue prior to making a decision or planning work activities.

Ask "How will this effect other departments, individuals, customers ... will we be able to leverage this improvement?"

"How can we better promote lessons learned?"

Think of each member of your team as a 'high jumper'. Celebrate the reaching of new heights... then raise the bar together.

Don't forget as you're raising the bar, so is the competition.

We can't do really big things every day. If we are really serious about walking the "continuous improvement" talk all the time, we have to focus on the small stuff too.

Jay sez -

**No matter the scope, situation, or task at hand... when completed – always ask, "Is it better than it was before?"**

## Consider these Lean Enablers

From a recent issue of the [Navigator](#), Gardner Denver

Lean Enterprise deployment happens when a company is trying to increase the "value-add" of its business segments to better provide products, services and information to its customers. In other words, it is a way to help companies reduce waste and to achieve their targeted goals. These goals include using less human effort and less manufacturing space, better utilization of assets and faster ways of developing and launching a new product.

There are some "enablers" to the Lean Enterprise techniques which we need to consider:

### Lean Enablers:

- > Lean minimizes the various costs associated with high inventory levels, long lead times, and inefficient processes. It also reduces operational costs, to boost, restore, and raise the competitiveness of a company.
- > Lean aims to eliminate most, if not all, forms of waste (most commonly inventory, travel, waiting time, and defects).
- > Many experts claim that by implementing lean techniques and strategies you can reduce the manufacturing lead-time by more than 75%.
- > As manufacturing lead time is lowered, the operational costs incurred from the various unnecessary steps should also be significantly reduced.

- > Lean helps companies maintain and increase their profits and earnings.
- > Lean tries to eliminate wasted space, which is an advantage when implementing it within our company. Efficient workspace is one of the primary factors that keep companies running smoothly and effectively.
- > Experts have estimated that if Lean techniques are adopted correctly, companies can reduce the requirement for physical floor space by five to thirty percent while maintaining or increasing the level of business.
- > Each one of these improvements increases our company's efficiency and savings. Companies that are using Lean techniques are significantly increasing their productivity by as much as eighty percent over a period of time.
- > With fewer interruptions and distractions, productivity is maximized - making Lean a must if you want to achieve your goals.
- > With the elimination of waste, the relationship among customers improves, along with the products and services offered to them.
- > When Lean cultures become standardized, inefficient (and often frustrating) practices of employees and management are, for the most part, gone. This leads to the creation of a more pleasant work environment.



### *Do you know who said ...*

***"It is not the fittest or most intelligent who will survive. It is those who are most receptive to change."***

- a) Tom Peters
- b) Charles Darwin
- c) Stephen Covey
- d) Donald Trump

b) Charles Darwin was an English naturalist who realized and presented compelling evidence that all species of life have evolved over time from common ancestors through the process he called natural selection. The fact that evolution occurs became accepted by the scientific community and much of the general public in his lifetime, but it was not until the emergence of the modern evolutionary synthesis from the 1930s to the 1950s that a broad consensus developed that natural selection was the basic mechanism of evolution. In modified form, Darwin's scientific discovery is the unifying theory of the [life sciences](#), explaining the diversity of life.

## ***A commitment to Improvement!***

- by Jay Watson

Believe things can be better!

Adopt the 10 % rule: set a personal goal to improve everything you're involved in by merely 10%. Small improvements add up quick!

Focus on people as well as processes. Keep in mind that quality is ultimately a matter of individual performance. It happens one day at a time, one person at a time.

Recognize and reward those who make improvements to products, processes, and services. What gets celebrated, gets repeated.

Say "Thank you!"

Respect People ... (continued from page 1)

**MANUFACTURING  
Safety Manuals**  
For companies with 10  
or more Employees. Satisfies  
"Written Safety Program"  
OSHA requirements



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... activity of placing safety first (safety walks, safety councils, safety audits, safety kaizens) with the true spirit of it: deep respect for the human whose safety you are protecting.

### **About The Author**

Jon Miller is co-founder and CEO of Gemba Research. He was born in Japan and lived there for 18 years. In 1993, Jon was fortunate to start his career working with consultants who were students of Taiichi Ohno.

Learn more:

<http://www.gembapantarei.com/about.html>

***"There's always room for  
improvement – it's the biggest  
room in the house."***

***- Louise Heath Leber***

**Model CIM (Continuous Improvement Mentality)**

### **Ways to "Walk the Talk"**

- Visibly support and promote Continuous Improvement in your day-to-day activities. (refer to attached article - "The Gemba Walk")
- Personally use, and encourage others to use a problem solving model when attacking issues. Refer to the free problem solving (PS) modules at: [www.freeleansite.com](http://www.freeleansite.com) [training tab]
- Continually improve processes in which subordinates perform their tasks.
- Use customer satisfaction as a key measure in business decisions.
- Encourage formal feedback on personal management behavior from peers, subordinates, superiors, and customers. Use feedback to modify personal style and behavior.
- Establish continuous improvement expectations and requirements.
- Meet improvement goals set for the organization.
- Celebrate success!

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Off the page...

\* *Gemba* is a Japanese term that means "actual place", and walking around the work place could be the most important part of a manager's job.

# The Gemba Walk<sup>[1]</sup>

By Norman Bodek

*During a trip to Japan, Dr. Ryuji Fukuda took me to a Meidensha Electric plant<sup>[2]</sup> outside of Tokyo, and introduced me to the plant manager. At 11:00AM, the plant manager got up from behind his desk. He asked me to join him on his daily walk; in fact he told me that he walked the plant twice a day every day and that it was the most valuable part of his day.*

*... it was the most valuable part of his day.*

*The plant manager said, "Norman, I select a different theme for every walk and this morning I am going to look at the quality charts to see if they have a real purpose for the company and for the employees; if people are keeping them up to date; to see how they're used; and to learn who looks at them and when they're looked at. I want to find out what is the real value of those quality charts."<sup>[3]</sup>*

It was a large manufacturing plant making electrical power equipment. As we walked over to the first department in the plant, the supervisor came over to meet us. The plant manager then inspected the quality charts<sup>[4]</sup> to see which ones were being displayed and if they were being kept up to date. All of the charts had current dates on them.

The plant manager then asked a series of questions to the supervisor about the usefulness of the quality charts including:

1. Who's responsible for updating the quality charts?
2. Do the other employees look at the charts?
3. How often do they look at them?
4. What value do the charts have for the employees?
5. Do our customers ever look at the charts?
6. Do our suppliers look at the charts?
7. Do you think the charts have an effect on quality?

The plant manager asked those questions and you could see the excitement on the face of the supervisor as he was answering the questions. I learned that there's enormous power in the leader asking questions and then **just listening** – yes; this is the key to ask the question and then to **just listen carefully**, not judgmentally.

When the plant manager looks at something with real interest, the people in the plant are interested in supporting the plant manager. They think, "If the charts are important to our plant manager then they must be important for us to keep them up to date."



Well, the reverse is also true and when the plant manager shows no interest in an item, there is often a tendency for that to just fall apart. They think, “We have so many other things to do. If the plant manager doesn’t look at those charts, they’re probably not very important.”

There was real learning going on as the supervisor was explaining the importance of the charts and how they played a vital role in the whole quality movement. To the supervisor, the charts were like a scorecard at an athletic event. Imagine going to a basketball game in which there is no score being kept. You would probably leave after a few moments. I saw a football game recently and the score was 28 to 4; people lost interest and started to leave the stands. It is the same in the plant and at work; we need both targets to shoot for, and we need to know the score to see if we’re meeting or exceeding those targets.

I could see the real power in this walk; it was a learning experience for the manager to be educated by his supervisor and employees. By selecting a different theme for every walk, he would eventually cover all of the important aspects of running a plant. Imagine after one year the manager could do over 400 walks a year: safety, cost savings, people development, quality, reducing the time line, eliminating wastes, etc, and nothing would be ‘lost within the cracks.’ By asking questions and not telling, he encouraged his employees to understand the importance of their work. In reality, he was letting them run the plant – his job was to be the catalyst, to see that everyone was being motivated to keep to the highest possible standard.

My head was already spinning with a great many thoughts as I recognized how empowering this experience was for this plant. I also knew that I had to change the way I managed my company.<sup>[5]</sup>

As the leader, the plant manager sets the tempo and sets an example for the plant. It’s up to the supervisor to follow the plant manager’s example when he/she talks to the employees – to ask them questions and not always give the answers.

Then we walked to the next department to meet with another supervisor. Since this was done every day at a specific time, the supervisor was prepared and waiting for us to come by. The plant manager repeated the same series of questions to this supervisor and listened. Now, after he listened to this second supervisor he was able to share some of what he learned from the first supervisor. He was careful not to criticize the second supervisor and he was careful not to compare the first department with the second department. He shared with sensitivity some of the new things he observed and learned.

First, we saw that all of the charts were kept up to date, and had real meaning for the workers in helping them sustain their quality efforts. I fully realized the real power in the Gemba walk:

1. When the manager shows an interest in something like quality charts, he is demonstrating that he feels they are important. Workers in the plant then ensure they are used and kept up to date.<sup>[6]</sup> If the plant manager does not show interest in them, workers have a tendency to stop keeping them up to date. “We have plenty to do to just do our job.”

2. By questioning the supervisor, there was an exchange of ideas on the subject. This was a learning experience for both the plant manager and the supervisor.
3. The plant manager now shared what he learned from the first department with the supervisor of the second and subsequent departments. "Wow." This Gemba walk was a great communication device and I could see why the plant manager considered this the most important part of his job.

I was very impressed. What a way to run a plant!

After we completed the entire walk, which took around an hour, we came back to the office area. Because there was a lot of learning, and the first departments did not receive feedback from the later departments, the plant manager wrote a **summary memo** to post on the bulletin board to share everything he learned with all of the employees.

Not everything was perfect, and there were a number of problems to solve, and new things to consider. He left it up to each supervisor and his or her employees to find a way to get these things done.<sup>[1]</sup> The steps of the Gemba Walk:

1. Select a theme for each walk.
2. Question the supervisors.
3. Listen attentively. This is a learning exercise for the manager.
4. Share what you learned as you walk through the plant.
5. Write a short memo on what you learned and post it for others to see.
6. Follow-up to see that progress is made.

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*Norman Bodek was instrumental in finding, translating, and publishing the works of the great manufacturing management geniuses of the past thirty years who brought us The Toyota Production System (Lean manufacturing), Total Quality Management (TQM) and other powerful tools and techniques. You may learn more about Norman Bodek and his recent books at: [www.leanaffiliates.com/idea\\_generation.htm](http://www.leanaffiliates.com/idea_generation.htm).*

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[1] Gemba means factory floor, and walking around the plant could be the most important part of a manager's job. Instead of feeling that you must lead others, your real strength is bringing out the best from others, letting them develop their talents and letting them run the business for you. As you learn from the workers, your job is to then disseminate your learning with everyone else – others in the plant and also sharing the power of this learning with your bosses.

[2] Meidensha Electric is a manufacturer of electric power equipment for the electric generation industry.

[3] How many companies have quality charts up on the wall but no one really looks at them or knows how to really use them?

[4] At those American plants I had earlier visited I hardly saw anything displayed on the walls to inspire people to improve. Here in Japan almost every square inch of wall space

was used to communicate some information to the worker: quality charts and statistics, ideas from the workers, safety figures, pictures of problems to be solved, certificates of courses taken by the individual workers, description of poka-yokes and change-over times, etc.

[5] Not always easy to do.

[6] Once in Scotland I was in a bottle manufacturing plant looking at the TPM charts. We had run an event three months earlier. Not one chart was kept up to date. The plant manager and the workers loved the training but without the plant manager following up people would just go back to their old ways of doing things – and TPM gets neglected.

[7] Another key is to empower the employees in the improvement process. If you make them responsible and then carefully follow up, a lot more power is given to the process.