

Kaizen and Its Importance in Our Lives

When we talk about LEAN management, Kaizen is one of the first word we all remember and discuss. In this article, let's try to understand what kaizen really is and how it can be practically used to improve the working conditions and more importantly individual job satisfaction.

It is utmost important that all employees feel valued in the workplace regardless of their position and the pay grade. A firm which has Kaizen built into its culture will improve the working conditions and bring all levels of employees and management together to achieve common goals.

So what is Kaizen?

Japanese word Kaizen means change for good which we call continuous improvement in English language. Continuous improvement highlights the fact that there are always room for improvement and never become complacency with current way of working, rather always explore ways to improve the current methods and systems. It is important to have clear improvements in pre-set intervals. It can be a significant improvement or a marginal improvement but there should be noticeable improvements.

So who's expected to work on Kaizen? Well shortest answer is everyone. It is important to understand that LEAN is not just a concept to reduce waste in manufacturing. LEAN is a philosophy that every individual, family,

society and even a country can practice to improve their lives.

Why we need KAIZAN in our lives?

Before we discuss how we could use Kaizen as a LEAN tool to improve the workplace, let us discuss how we could use it to improve our individual lives. It is widely accepted that we need to develop ourselves in 3 fronts in order to enjoy the life. Those are our knowledge, appearance, and soul.

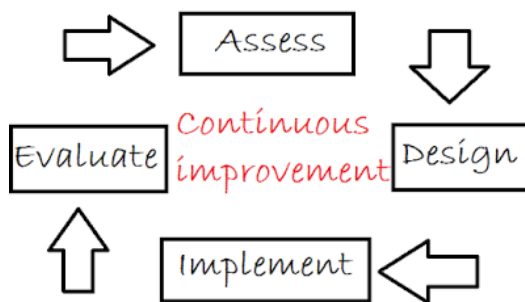
If we elaborate those concepts little further, it is widely agreed that having a good education, being street smart and developing a good common sense is essential to lead a healthy productive life. It is equally important to understand how the society work and develop our skills on manners, chivalry, dress sense and physic. We all heard the saying 'first impression matters'. It doesn't matter how much paper qualifications one has if he doesn't know how to look good in a given situation as it will hinder the progress. Similarly, it is paramount to realize that in order to achieve long term success and progress, it is vital to understand the importance of having integrity, empathy and basically be a good human being. Understandably most of us need some work done in one of the areas or in some cases most of the 3 areas we discussed above. Simply we need Kaizen in our lives.

Now if we look at our workplaces, some are operating smoothly and some are not so smoothly and often need assistance to get things together. Either way we all agree that no workplace is perfect just as no individual is perfect. However, the important factor here

is to understand the need for improvement and explore ways to do it.

Once come to the realization that either as an individual or as a company that improvements are needed, first step to do is to work on an action plan. Typically action plan consist of following steps,

1. Write down the areas need improvements and any related background
2. Review the current situation
3. Brainstorm with the team for various possible suggestions for improvements
4. Workout an action plan & tryout suggested improvements
5. Set KPI's and monitor the progress to determine which methods work and which are not
6. Once reach initially expected results, follow the same steps again to set new targets



Let's take an example to see how Kaizan works in the shop floor.

1. Problem:

- Number of damages in the production line A is above average

2. Analysis:

- The type of foot in some machines wrong
- Operator not trained to check her own work
- No visual operation diagram or mock up available on the machine

3. Solution:

- Introduction of risk analysis & pre-production meeting prior to line input
- Train the operator properly and making sure mock up available on every machine
- Implement quality assurance system such as traffic light or 1 in 7 to ensure continuous Progress

Continuous improvement strategy would be to introduce quality targets and repeat necessary steps to achieve expected results and either remain their or further improve

Successful Kaizan events will lead to another important tool of LEAN called standardization. We will explore this concept next week.

About the Author: Charm Rammandala is the founder & CEO of IStrategy USA. He counts over two decades in fashion supply chain in diverse roles as Lean Manager and Model himself. He is an expert in rolling out programs in Lean apparel manufacturing and Sustainable labour costing. His former positions included being the first Lean Technologist at George Sourcing Services UK Ltd.