Gemba Walks

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Who Am I?

• Founder and CEO of LEI, 1997-2010.
• Senior Advisor to new CEO John Shook.
• Author, mostly recently of *Gemba Walks*.
• Gemba walker to grasp the situation and learn! (“Go see, ask why, show respect.”)
• Happy to be here, after gemba walks at two of the IW Best Plant winners.
Who Are You?

• Line managers in manufacturing operations.
• Leaders and members of process improvement teams (staffs).
• Leaders and members of various vertical functions: IT, HR, product engineering, finance, purchasing, etc.
• And…consultants.
Gemba Walks
A management practice to grasp the situation before taking action

GRASP the SITUATION

ACTION
CHECK
STUDY

PLAN
DO

TRY
HYPOTHESIS

ADJUST
REFLECT
Gemba Walks

Where?
What?
Why?
How?
Who?
When?
Where?

• On the gemba: The place where value is created; where value-creating work is done:
  • Primary:
    ✓ Engineering
    ✓ Operations
    ✓ Customer support
  • Support (incidental work):
    ✓ Line management
What?

• A horizontal journey along a value stream (a value creating process) across departments, functions, and organizations to facilitate:

✓ A transformational leap in performance.
✓ Sustainable improvement through PDCA.
✓ Coaching the next generation of line managers and improvement staffs.
Why?

• Organizations are vertical & complex, but…
• Value flows horizontally across organizations to customers.
• Managers look up toward the top (the CEO) for direction, but…
• All value is created at the bottom where the actual work is done.
• A gemba walk helps managers see and reconcile the horizontal with the vertical.
How?

• The unit of observation is a value creating process – a product family value stream.

• A process is simply a sequence of actions that must be taken correctly in the correct order at the correct time to create value for some customer.

• All horizontal processes flow through vertical processes in a value creating system: Action, process, system.
How?

• Select a value stream. (Any primary or support stream will do.)
• Gather everyone touching the value stream and talk a walk together.
• Ask about:
  ✓ Purpose (solve the customer’s problem)
  ✓ Process (how it actually works)
  ✓ People (how they are engaged in creating, sustaining & improving the process)
How?

• Draw a current state map….or not, depending on the circumstances.
How?

• The objective of a gemba walk is not to draw a map, or to solve a specific problem, or to Plan or Do or Check or Act.

• It is to grasp the situation by involving everyone touching the process to understand purpose, process, and people.

• Once the situation is understood improvement is possible and more likely to succeed.
Who? (The Hard Part)

• Ideally, the CEO and COO with the function heads, customers, suppliers, and value stream leader!

• More realistically, the value stream leader and those directly touching the stream.
Who? (The Hard Part)

But today…

• The CEO and COO usually lack both knowledge and courage.

• There is no person responsible for the performance of most value streams – a value stream leader.
Who?

- How about you?
- The operations manager for a facility.
- The product line manager.
- The head of the improvement team.
- The purchasing manager looking up stream.
- The sales manager looking down stream.
When?

• Before commencing a lean transformation in a value stream.

• Multiple times a year for each value stream to refresh gemba knowledge and keep the management team focused on cross-functional problems.

• Weekly or daily to grasp the changing situation in real time.
An Example of the Latter

• A daily management gemba walk for the senior executive and the function heads:
  ✓ The 8 am walk through the fulfillment value stream to assess the situation.
  ✓ The 10 am walk across all verticals to address value stream issues in real time.

Note: An obeya meeting in a product development process is another form of a cross-departmental gemba walk.
Gemba Walks

• The best way to truly grasp your situation as an organization – as a community of value creation – so that good, lean things can happen.

• A practice you can learn by practice and continually learn from practicing.