

## Getcha Boots On (and go out and see what is happening)

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING SITUATION: A PLASTICS MANUFACTURING COMPANY SUPPLYING PRODUCTS TO RETAILERS GETS HIT WITH A SPATE OF CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS/RETURNS AND DOESN'T KNOW WHAT IS CAUSING THE PROBLEM. THE CEO PRESSURES THE VP OF OPERATIONS TO FIX THE PROBLEM AND THE VP OF OPERATIONS TURNS TO THE PLANT MANAGER. THE PLANT MANAGER GETS TOGETHER WITH HIS PRODUCTION, QUALITY, MAINTENANCE AND PURCHASING MANAGERS TO FIGURE OUT THE PROBLEM. THE PRODUCTION MANAGER BLAMES PURCHASING FOR PROCURING CHEAP MATERIALS. THE QUALITY MANAGER POINTS TO LACK OF TRAINING FOR OPERATORS. THE MAINTENANCE MANAGER SAYS HE NEEDS NEWER EQUIPMENT WHILE THE PURCHASING MANAGER BLAMES CORPORATE POLICIES FOR CHOOSING SUPPLIERS. THE PLANT MANAGER WONDERS WHAT TO DO.

The above situation is very common. The plant manager could spend hours discussing and debating the problem with his team. He could analyze all kinds of historical data in an effort to uncover new information. Each group or department always has its own hypothesis on the nature of the problem, making it more complicated. So where should he start?

If this situation is presented to a Toyota trained Lean/TPS (Toyota Production System) expert, the first thing he/she would ask is "Did you Go and See?" This concept of "Go and See," known as "Genchi Genbutsu" in Japanese simply means, "Go to the place where the problem is happening and observe what is happening with an objective mind."

This may sound extremely simple and trivial at first but the ability to Go and See effectively has a learning curve that is as steep as the one for playing golf. Because every time one Goes and Sees, one can learn more about the nuances of the situation.

Go and See can be traced back to the days of Taiichi Ohno, the originator of concepts of Toyota Production System. Mr. Ohno would make his protégés stand in one location on the shop floor for eight hours at a stretch in order to enable them to learn how to Go and See. He would make them repeat the exercise for days. This activity came to be known as "Standing in Ohno's circle."

The purpose of Go and See is to enable managers with gaining a deep understanding of processes so these managers become skilled at recognizing the source of abnormal conditions that change the way processes operate.

While true Lean experts would concur that Go and See is the most fundamental tenet of Lean production, it is ironic that Go and See is also one of the least practiced Lean concepts. Why is that so? There are a couple of key driving factors:

1. Factory information and reporting systems have become more and more sophisticated and managers have come to believe that they can obtain all the information they need without having to Go and See the actual situation; and
2. Top management places an inordinate focus on end results rather than processes that contribute to end results. Sophisticated computer systems and focus on end results are not bad by themselves but do drive behaviors that create a disincentive to Go and See.

So what does all of this mean to you as a manager?

Go back to basics when it comes to solving problems. All the tools and techniques that are part of Lean Production such as continuous flow, pull systems, 5S, TPM, etc. help ease identification of wastes and abnormal conditions. But if one does not Go and See and understand the reasons for the abnormalities, these abnormalities will continue to exist and there will be no real improvement.

You may sit and wonder that all of this sounds second nature and uninteresting but we challenge you to Go and See your workplace and ask yourself and your team three simple questions: What is supposed to happen? What is actually happening? Why is it so?

Are you ready for the challenge?

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