



March 2011

# e-LEAN update

## Dirty Laundry

As I facilitate Kaizen events in various agencies and teams begin to map their “current state” process, a team member more often than not asks, “Do you want to know how the process is supposed to be, or do you want to know what we actually do?”

It may seem an odd question, perhaps, but it highlights an important yet sometimes uncomfortable component of any serious improvement effort. That is, to truly see the waste and improve our work processes, we may need to air a little dirty laundry.

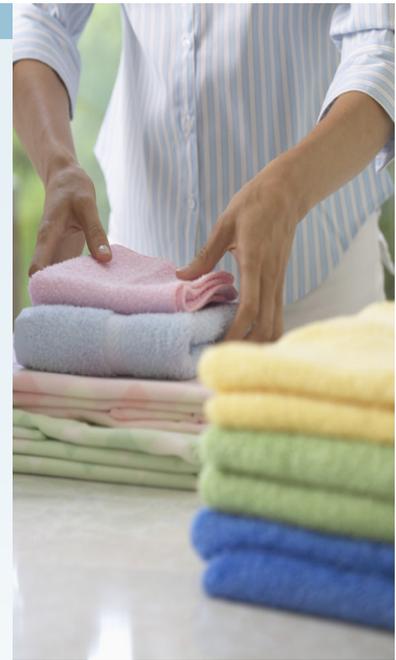
### A case in point

During a recent tour of a private sector warehousing facility, my guide boasted that their inventory tracking system was 99.5 percent accurate. In other words, what was on the shelves matched what their database indicated should be on the shelves all but 0.5 percent of the time. Sounds good, right?

Well, it did *sound* good – until we learned that they were really *not* tracking what was coming in or going out very well at all. Because of that, the warehouse supervisor felt compelled to adjust the database (usually substantially), before submitting the monthly report, to match what was counted on the shelves. That way, the report looked good to management, the warehouse supervisor met his performance targets for accuracy and everyone was happy.

The supervisor believed to do otherwise would risk being fired. Unfortunately, by “cooking the books,” the supervisor was hiding a defect in their receiving and shipping processes which ultimately prevented management from knowing about the problem and working to fix it (as opposed to terminating the warehouse supervisor).

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*While no one really likes to air their dirty laundry, it is still the only way to get it clean.*

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### Are you Lean?

Nearly 3,000 Minnesota public employees have participated in Lean activities — how about you? Visit the calendar on the [Lean website](http://www.lean.state.mn.us), [www.lean.state.mn.us](http://www.lean.state.mn.us), for opportunities to get involved in Lean efforts at your agency!

## Dirty Laundry *(continued from page 1)*

To make serious process improvement happen, management needs to create an environment in which employees are encouraged to raise and highlight shortcomings in their operations. Not a very comfortable thing – or likely to happen – if people are fearful of losing their jobs. Ultimately, employees must be convinced that management is more concerned about fixing process than affixing blame.

Because, while no one really likes to air their dirty laundry, it is still the only way to get it clean.

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## Return Mail Kaizen Event, Dept .of Revenue



The Department of Revenue conducted a Kaizen event Feb. 28-Mar. 3 to examine the agency's return mail process. The department manages the state's revenue system and administers 28 different taxes.

The team sought to streamline and standardize the return mail process, setting a goal of reducing the amount of return mail by 50 percent and to process and re-send returned mail within three business days. The "current" process, the team determined, was labor-intensive with too many handoffs and a poor tracking system for return mail.

The Kaizen team created a new process that will reduce costs and better utilize the agency's most valuable resource: It's people. Document handoffs will be reduced by 50 percent, tasks by 31 percent and waits by 33 percent for an overall 69 percent reduction in process time.

The Kaizen team will launch the new process by April 1 and the centralized work unit by July 1. Anticipated benefits of this new process and work unit will include improved customer service and better utilization of technology.

## Lean Training and Kaizen Event Dates

See [LEAN Online](#) for current Lean Training and Events information and registration: [www.lean.state.mn.us](http://www.lean.state.mn.us)

**March 14-17**, Minneapolis Community and Technical College Kaizen Event

**March 21-24**, Department of Human Services Kaizen Event

**April 4-8**, Department of Health Kaizen Event

**April 26**, Lean 101, Registration now open

**April 27-28**, Kaizen Facilitator Training, Registration now open

## Enterprise LEAN Recognized in State of the State Address

In his State of the State address on Feb. 9, Governor Dayton recognized Enterprise Lean for improving government service and cutting costs. The complete [address](#) is available on Governor Dayton's website, [www.mn.gov/governor](http://www.mn.gov/governor).