



e-LEAN update

Being an undercover boss

I am typically not a fan of reality shows. The premises are usually beyond the pale, and can they really be real if they are filmed and edited?

But one that I find intriguing is “Undercover Boss,” which features a company president or CEO, usually in disguise, working at three or four jobs within their company over several days. Their objective is to see first-hand the work that frontline employees are doing.

From emptying airline lavatories to cleaning hotel rooms to serving restaurant diners, the bosses labor alongside these workers, stumbling and bumbling in their new jobs but gaining valuable insight into how the work is really getting done.

While the reality of this show may be questionable, it does appear to inform these leaders in ways that never would have occurred had they stayed in their ivory towers, perusing quarterly reports and attending senior leadership meetings. These CEOs usually get an earful from their new work colleagues about the company, the bosses and the nonsense they must overcome to do their jobs. This is exactly the information leaders fixated on improvement need to hear.

Some leaders insist they are “out there” talking with and listening to their staff. But are they just taking the “Executive Tour” (“Oh no, the president is coming to our branch office. Let’s clean everything up and hide the bad stuff. We’ll put the mission and vision statement posters back on the wall and pretend everything is going wonderfully!”) Instead, leaders should be “Going to the Gemba.”

Going to the Gemba, in Lean parlance, is the opposite of the Executive Tour; it is getting out there, really watching and learning. It is convincing employees that you want to see the good, but more importantly, you want to see things that are not good so they can be fixed.

So here is the challenge in Going to the Gemba. Unless you are comfortable wearing a wig and horn-rimmed glasses, you need to build the trust and confidence of those on the front lines. You want and need to see the things that are not going well. Your intent is not to inflict pain on them. In fact, the goal is to make it better and easier for them to do their job well.

-Tom Baumann, Lean Program Manager



Gemba is a Japanese term meaning “the actual place” or “the real place.” Gemba refers to the place where value is created. It can be any “site” where the service provider interacts directly with the customer. Lean Gemba means getting out in the workplace, watching and learning first hand about the good and bad.

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The Minnesota Department of Health Kaizen Team

Kaizen streamlines, improves process for identifying, reporting and treating STDs

It's a topic sure to put a damper on any dinner party conversation. But identifying, treating and reporting cases of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) is a critically important issue among health departments across the United States.

As a result of a recent Minnesota Department of Health Kaizen event, patients and partners will now be diagnosed and treated faster, while the agency will be able to identify disease trends and outbreaks quicker, make better use of staff time and reduce staff frustration levels. The scope of the event addressed the process from the receipt of lab and case reports to recording investigation outcomes and the corresponding flow of information and documents.

The event's goals included developing or adopting performance standards for critical program activities; reducing absent surveillance and disease investigation forms to zero; reducing the number of surveillance and disease investigation forms with missing or inaccurate information by 25 percent; and reducing the amount of time needed to report cases to the Federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

The team observed that the current state of their process was time, labor and paper intensive; that multiple electronic systems did not "talk" to one another, leading to errors; and that waiting and hand-offs were plentiful, among others.

Among the team's recommendations for a future state: adapting processes that would utilize a single system to streamline the data flow process, centralizing data storage and access to reduce or eliminate the need for paper records and multiple data entry and auditing and reporting on process performance.

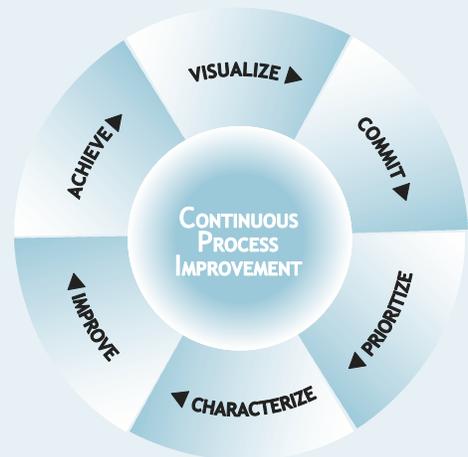
The Department of Health is rolling out its action plan for achieving the "future state" over the next several weeks, with process implementation scheduled for January.

E-LEAN Update

Thank you for your interest and participation in improving the efficiency of Minnesota state government operations. If you have further questions, comments or would like to set up a Lean improvement event, contact Tom Baumann at Tom.Baumann@state.mn.us.

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