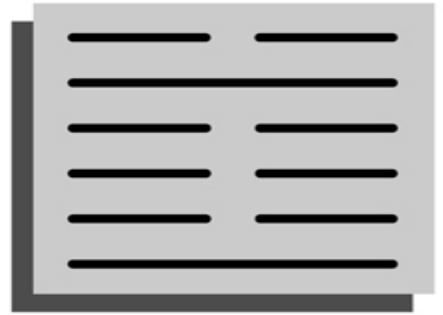


Change Management Associates



January 2012

Featured Topic



It's How You Say It Words Matter in Continuous Improvement

Dear Drew,

During recent gemba walks at several companies, I have been reminded of a phenomenon that has been referred to as 'no problem is problem'. There are many problems, but people are unable or reluctant to bring them to light for numerous reasons. Participants in these walks of a product or service flow ask associates at each stop, 'What issues exist?', 'What problems are you encountering?', "What's wrong with the process?", or questions of similar meaning. The responses are "Nothing comes to mind", "Everything is fine", and other variations of 'no problem here'. In a culture of continuous improvement, problems are treated as gold and people readily identify them. So what can be done to get over this hurdle?

Let's consider the possible causes for the 'no problem' response. First, it may lie in the words themselves and the thoughts that the terms give rise to in the minds of people. Often 'problem' has a negative meaning. There may be a fear that problems identified in an area will be viewed as evidence of poor performance. Perhaps in the past, people identifying what's 'wrong' to management experienced a form of 'shooting the messenger.' Management's response was one of blame. Other people might view the identification of problems as 'griping', 'whining' and the like. Even the seemingly innocuous question, "What ideas for improvement do you have?" can be taken in unintended ways. "If there is a better way, don't you think I would have thought of it?" is an oft heard response, if not explicitly then implicitly.

Upcoming Events



CMA and our network affiliates have the following events scheduled:

AME Events:

The A3 Improvement Process & Tour Reading, PA February 24, 2012

Hosted by Remcon Plastics the morning tour will highlight the company's application of operational excellence concepts in this high mix model environment. The afternoon session will cover how Remcon uses A3s to engage its workforce to solve problems and drive continuous improvement. Attendees should bring a problem so that they can work with host company members to initiate an actual A3 and start the improvement process.

[Click here](#) for more information!

Customer Focused Events: Lean Office & Service Pittston, PA March 22, 2012

Hosted by Benco Dental. The morning tour will highlight several non-production applications of lean in this distribution

Second, it could be that people truly believe that no problems exist. In the context of current circumstances, work is getting done, customers are being served, basically all is seemingly OK. After all, people have been doing what they have been doing for quite some time and it has been good enough up to this point. So when the question is asked, 'What opportunities for improvement exist?' it should not be a surprise that a common response is 'I can't think of anything'.

The fact of the matter is there can be several possible causes, the specific ones at work are personal to the individuals involved. There is a need to reframe the question. Instead of "What problems do you have?" consider a different form of question. "How can we improve our telephone response time by 25% with our current staffing?" "How can we maintain a high level of on-time-delivery while reducing our finished goods inventory by 30%". "How might we meet an expected 15% increase in demand in the next year with the resources that we have?"

These examples provide a different context for people to provide a response. They prompt people to consider a different set of circumstances from those that currently exist. So, for people who truly believe that no problems exist, posing questions in this form tend to 'stretch' their thinking thereby initiating the creative process of problem solving to close the constructed 'gap'.

There is also a positive aspect to questions in this form. They represent a forward looking challenge rather than a backward reflection of what is wrong. Recently this has been called 'target condition' thinking. People will be more likely to view the prompting in the positive way it is intended. People often rise to a challenge as it is a path to achievement. Achievement can lead to a satisfying and rewarding work environment.

Words also matter as we approach the "Do" stage of Deming's Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) improvement cycle. At this stage it is often emphasized that it is really about 'experimentation'. We don't know with 100% certainty that a change will be effective until we try it and "Check" that it does. Up to this point it has been a discussion of a hypothesis. Now words will lead to action - change is really about to happen. Naturally there is some apprehension. The emphasis on experimentation is an attempt to ease people's anxiety about change. "Let's try it and see if it works" is often said at this point. However, the anxiety remains. This simple expression can give rise to negative thoughts such as "What if it doesn't work?" It becomes a matter of success versus failure, and people generally fear failure. Would we evoke a different reaction if we said, "Let's try it and see what we learn"? This really does better convey Deming's true intent of PDCA and its emphasis on experimentation. Would making this statement help to allay people's natural apprehension about change?

With enough positive experiences, and sufficient repetition, people will begin to embrace continuous improvement and make it part of

operation. The afternoon session will review the application of key lean concepts to office and service environments. [Click here](#) for more information.

Visual Management

Logan Township, NJ

April 12, 2012

Hosted by Engineered Arresting Systems, the morning tour will highlight how the host is using visual management systems to drive continuous improvement not just in operations, but for the overall business. Participate in an actual 'boardwalk'. The afternoon workshop will dive more deeply into the subject. For more information [click here](#)

Training Within Industries

(TWI)

Homer, NY

April 25, 2012

Hosted by Albany International, the tour will highlight various lean concepts in practice including 5S, Pull, and TWI - a foundation concept of Lean. An introductory session on Job Instruction (JI) will be provided by a world leading authority on the subject. [Click here](#) for more information.

Be sure to check out our publications!

"Lean Office & Services Simplified" (2012 Shingo Prize recipient)

This will become the definitive how-to book on the subject.

"The Complete Lean Enterprise" (2005 Shingo Prize recipient)
VSM for Administrative & Office Processes

"Value Stream Mapping for Lean Development"

their everyday routine. They will catch the 'change habit'. But it starts with people, particularly leaders, asking the 'correct' question or making 'appropriate' statements. We must remember at all times that words really do matter. It is not just what you say, but how you say it that can be so important.

I ask you to reflect on the terminology that you use, the questions that you ask, and the statements that you make. Are they causing, in part, some unintended responses? Would a different approach yield better results?

Best Regards

Drew Locher

Managing Director, Change Management Associates

"Lean Office & Service Simplified" is a 2012 Shingo Prize Recipient!

"Lean Office & Service Simplified: The Definitive How-to Guide" has received a 2012 Shingo Prize for Research. The book published in February 2011 provides detailed step-by-step methodologies to apply all of the key lean concepts to office and service environments.

Entire chapters are provided on the subjects of Standard Work, Visual Management Systems, Value Stream Management, Flow, and Level Pull - all in the context of office and service. The book finishes with a chapter on leadership - the key to sustainment and the transformation to a culture of continuous improvement.

Drawing on over 25 years of practical experience, each concept is broken into its fundamental elements to help the reader better understand its true intent thereby building confidence to experiment. The book is available from [Productivity Press](http://www.productivitypress.com).

(Reviewed in the 2nd Issue 2010 of AME's Target magazine)

Books are available at www.productivitypress.com

Go to www.cma4results.com Click on "News" to find articles and past newsletters. Recent newsletters are:

"What's Your Problem? The Basics of Problem Solving"

"Can We Talk?" Encouraging Meaningful Conversations in Business.

"Because I Said So" Managing by Objective (MBO) versus Striving for Target Condition

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