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RICK BRIMEYER

Acting into a new way of thinking

Being a business consultant specializing in Lean is a bit like being a personal fitness or weight loss coach. Lasting improvement requires fundamental changes in both behaviors and ultimately, thinking.

Because change is required at such a fundamental level, the success rate is not especially high. With personal fitness, the challenge is exacerbated by the noise and temptation created by fad workouts, diets and pills. We're assaulted by advertisements for these "secrets" each time we turn on the TV, surf the web or pick up a magazine.

Likewise, when trying to develop an organization that aggressively attacks waste to improve its processes, there are no silver bullets. Sustained success requires a change in how the organization thinks and in what it values. In short, changes to its culture.

That, in a nutshell, is the challenge. It's hard enough to change a single personal habit much less a number of habits for an entire organization!

So it's understandable that recently, as I explained the importance of cultural change to sustained success to a new client, a manager pleaded, "But how do you change culture?"

First, let's agree on how you don't change it ... with an edict, a memo or a

training class.

John Kotter's book, "Leading Change," outlines eight phases which an organization must successfully navigate in order to realize lasting change:

1. Create a compelling case for change.
2. Identify a core team of leaders who support the change to guide its progress.
3. Create a vision of the future and a high level plan for getting there.
4. Communicate the vision constantly.
5. Enable employees to do the right thing; including removing barriers.
6. Create short term wins.
7. Produce more wins (i.e., don't let up).
8. Ground everything in the new culture.

Kotter's book is required reading for any leader hoping to impact lasting change within their organization.

While the various Lean tools play an important role in attaining success, they are inadequate by themselves. An organization can no more become Lean solely by implementing tools than any Jane or Joe can



Rick Brimeyer

become a mechanic simply by filling their toolbox at Sears.

Many organizations that have successfully changed learned that an effective way of accomplishing Kotter's Steps 5 and 6 above are to get employees to act themselves into a new way of thinking. Tools can play a significant role in this process. Allow me an example:

5S is a Lean tool used for establishing and maintaining a clean and organized workplace, be it physical for the factory or virtual in the office. While the first three S's basically involve general clean-up, the last two S's establish standards for clearly defining the new level and establishing accountability to ensure the standards are maintained.

While few folks will argue with a clean, organized workplace, some may initially cringe at the thought of having their work defined by standards and being held accountable to them. But those attitudes start to change as 5S is implemented and they begin to realize:

- Hey, I like being able to rely on this tool being stored in the same place ... every time.
- It's nice knowing that when I come into work that the prior shift will have left things clean.
- When I come up with a better idea, it's

rewarding to see the standard change and everybody embrace my idea.

Thus, the 5S tool is used to act the organization into a new way of thinking about — even valuing — establishing and adhering to standards. Occasionally, I'll run into an acquaintance that has obviously undergone a major positive change in their personal fitness and inquire how they did it.

The answer invariably includes some sort of wake-up, picking a method of exercise that they enjoyed enough to stick with, and enjoying the rewards of feeling better and receiving positive feedback.

A virtuous circle evolves in which they are then able to exercise more, thus realizing more benefits and its associated feedback.

Ultimately, they reach a condition in which they can hardly bare to skip exercise. They've acted themselves into a new way of thinking. That's the goal for your organization.

Rick Brimeyer is the President of Brimeyer LLC, an independent management consulting firm located in Ames which guides organizations to higher performance by focusing on process improvement and leadership development. Further information is available at www.brimeyerllc.com or by calling 515-450-8855.