Lean MANUFACTURING SOLUTIONS PARTNERSHIP INC.
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Question Everything

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ASK QUESTIONS

It always amazes me how some of the most impactful solutions are uncovered when we ask the simplest of questions. Asking questions is the cheapest way to find improvement ideas. The key is to invite others with differing views and experiences into your organization and give them the opportunity to ask those questions. After all, the simplest of all problem solving tools is the question "Why?" and the most effective method of teaching is the Socratic Method which is based on asking questions.

INITIAL QUESTIONS

When monitoring a process, whether it is a manual or automated process, we must know what questions to ask. The initial questions should be those aimed at the elimination of tasks. Questions such as…

Is the customer paying us to do this (Value Add)?

Why is what we are doing necessary?

What is its purpose?

CONSOLIDATING QUESTIONS

Once we decide upon which tasks seem necessary, we then ask questions aimed at consolidating tasks.

Where should the task be performed?

When should the task be completed?

Who is best qualified to do it?

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT QUESTIONS

With the consolidated list of value adding tasks complete, we want to begin asking those questions that will keep us continually improving the process. The question below is aimed at simplifying and continuously improving.

What is the best way to accomplish this task?

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SMED EXAMPLE

To illustrate the impact of this approach, let me share a personal example of a SMED (Single Minute Exchange of Die) event with one of our clients. We were looking to reduce the changeover time on a piece of equipment called a coil expander. During the analysis of the changeover, we noticed ~20 minutes were being spent removing tooling from the expanding rods to prevent certain tubes from being "belled." Belling a tube is necessary when inserting another tube for brazing later in the process. The operators had accepted this method since it was how they had "always done it." When asked the question, "Why can't you bell the tube anyway?" the engineer in charge had no reply. From there, we went to the production area (as any good engineer would) and asked the operator. The operator stated having belled tubes that didn't need to be belled was no issue, but receiving un-belled tubes that should have been belled is a problem. When asked if operators had ever received the un-belled tubes in the wrong location causing rework they responded with a definite, "Yes!" So by asking some simple questions we uncovered two things: 1. We eliminated changeover time (20 minutes) by leaving the bell tooling intact. 2. We also eliminated the risk of the removal of the incorrect bell tooling by the expander operator which would have created rework downstream.

As demonstrated above, asking questions is a very powerful tool to improve any process (service, manufacturing, front-office, etc…), so we must QUESTION EVERYTHING. At LMSPI, our practitioners have > 20 years of experience in asking the right questions, teaching others to do the same, and helping organizations discover the right solutions. We have experienced the power of this technique in many industries, countries, and products. If you feel overwhelmed by the amount of problems in your organization, or have "problems with anniversaries," we can help.

You can reach Mike at his direct email mike@LMSPI.com to learn more.