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DEPARTMENT OF
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

5S LEADER'S FIELD GUIDE

Practical Advice for Establishing a Healthy 5S Culture
Within Your Organization

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Chapter 1

What is 5S?

5S is perhaps the most misunderstood and underestimated of all the Lean tools. Deceptively simple and seemingly shallow, only a handful of organizations that attempt to implement 5S recognize its full value. Unfortunately, businesses that fail to reap the complete benefits are almost assuredly doomed to harvest less than their fair share from any subsequent continuous improvement efforts.

Let's start out with the basic definition and description of 5S. This can be garnered from a hundred different websites or perhaps from a university lecturer who rarely leaves campus to confront the real world of business. I'll call it the Wikipedia definition:

5S is a methodology for creating a clean and organized workplace. The name is derived from five Japanese words describing the various components of the methodology which, when written in English, all start with the letter S. The five components and a brief description are:

1. **Sort** – identifying and keeping in the work area only the inventory, tools (including information tools) and maintenance items absolutely required to support the daily value-adding activities of the work area
2. **Showcase/Shine** – creating a “good as new” work area via cleaning, painting, improving lighting, etc.
3. **Set in Order** – deciding on the most efficient place and method to store all survivors of the Sort activity
4. **Standardize** – establishing clear, visual standards to maintain the work area to the level obtained from the prior three components
5. **Sustain** – establishing the discipline to ensure the standards above are followed

The benefits of 5S are usually defined as the creation of a cleaner, safer, and more organized workplace. This results in a reduction in the wastes of motion, transportation and defects. Improved morale is often cited as an important byproduct due to reduced frustration associated with searching and the pride that accompanies a visually pleasing workplace.

While all of this is true, the above view is quite limited and overlooks the most important aspect of this critical Lean tool. 5S is indeed a tool for creating a clean and organized workplace. But it's so much more than that. Let me share a little bit about my own journey to a better understanding of 5S.

Like any good Plant Manager, I introduced 5S as one of our key Lean tools whenever I taught new employee orientation. I preferred to use a simple analogy of cleaning a home closet to demystify the strange and exotic Japanese terms for my new fellow employees.

Chapter 3

The Leader's Role for Successful 5S

Creating an environment in which 5S can thrive requires both leadership and management qualities. It's worth discussing both prior to proceeding.

Leadership is the ability to communicate and inspire others towards a vision for an improved future state. Leadership involves working *on* the process or status quo in an effort to improve it. It requires personal passion, courage, patience, and commitment.

Management is the skill to ensure that maximum results are obtained from the existing process or situation. It entails effectively setting expectations, establishing timely and accurate feedback systems, and having the discipline, tactfulness, and courage to respond quickly and appropriately to out-of-control situations. Management is all about working *within* the process or current situation. It requires discipline, courage, personal skill, and commitment.

Like other Lean tools, 5S requires both leadership and management capabilities. First and foremost, a decision to pursue 5S is a decision to *lead* your organization to new levels of cleanliness and organization *plus* standardization and accountability. While little pushback is expected from the desire for a tidier workplace, the degree of improvement envisioned and the discipline necessary to sustain that level will challenge even the strongest of leaders.

John P. Kotter does an excellent job of explaining the critical components of transforming an organization in *Leading Change* (Harvard Business School Press, 1996). I highly recommend this book for any leader contemplating major change within their organization. Kotter identifies eight components to successful change efforts, paraphrased below as:

1. Create a compelling case for change
2. Establish a core team of trusted allies
3. Develop the vision and high level strategy
4. Constantly communicate the vision
5. Enable people to do the right thing
6. Generate and recognize short term wins
7. Produce more gains
8. Ground everything in the new culture

I'd like to take a look at each of these eight components with a specific slant on how they apply to a leader's efforts to implement effective 5S within their organization. For the purpose of my discussion, I'll assume that effective 5S does not currently exist within the organization. Also, although the decision to implement 5S may be part of a larger decision to implement Lean methods, I'll

limit my discussion to only those ramifications directly resulting from the decision to pursue 5S.

Create a compelling case for change

A wise leader recognizes that the decision to lead is not solely a personal choice. It requires the willing acceptance of others to follow. The level of the organization's commitment to follow depends on the trust it places in you as a leader, its overall comfort with change, and the effectiveness of your message describing the reasons for leaving the status quo behind and for pursuing the future state.

Thus, your first task in leading your organization to meaningful 5S is to create a compelling case for it. Now, while almost everyone will agree with the idea of a *nice* workplace, it's imperative that your message is clear in that your vision far exceeds simply *nice*. Your future state calls for new levels of housekeeping and organization that most may see as unnecessary, perhaps even foolhardy. Your vision also involves establishing a culture of discipline and standard work to sustain the high levels attained that will likely make most employees uncomfortable.

Followers must have a clear understanding of what they're signing up for so they can make an informed decision. This is especially true for those early adaptors who you will be recruiting as allies to lead the change process. Underselling the amount of change desired or the anticipated amount of hardship involved in getting there typically leads to future distrust and potential mutiny as the facts become clearer down the road.

Chapter 4

Sort

What Is Sort?

The goal of Sort is to identify only the inventory, tools (including information tools) and maintenance items absolutely required to support the daily value-adding activities of the work area. While this sounds like a straightforward objective, it is often confounded with various questions and barriers:

1. What if we only use it once in awhile?
2. How do we know for sure that we won't need it tomorrow?
3. We don't use it, but it's too good to throw out.
4. We only use three of the 12 sockets, by why would we want to break up a perfectly good set?
5. If we get rid of this old inventory, we'll have to write it off as a loss.

In addition, as you may have experienced from personal sorting activities in your own home or office, the simple process of parting with possessions that were "precious" at one time can be

emotional. This attachment can be totally independent of whether the items continue to possess any current real value.

For this reason, I've found it helpful to establish a Sort process that is as unbiased as possible. One such process is based on four simple, objective questions:

1. Is the item currently used in the work area?
2. If so, how often is it used?
3. If not, is it used elsewhere, i.e., is it misplaced?
4. If it is not used in this area or others, does it still possess a minimum (pre-determined) value?

I've also found it useful to separate items into three classifications:

1. Inventory
2. Tools used to add value, including work instructions
3. Supplies used to maintain the area (trash cans, cleaning supplies, lubricants, tools used for preventative maintenance)

This process starts by designating temporary holding locations as shown in Figure 4-1. Simply sub-dividing floor space using painter's tape and labeling with signs constructed of scratch paper works well. Sufficient space is required to accommodate all items currently located in the work area to be addressed.

Appendix A

Creating a Compelling Case for Change & Selecting a Core Team of Trusted Allies

Below is an example of opening comments from a leader to his prospective core team:

Thank you for your time and attention this morning. I understand that all of you are very busy, but this is a very important discussion and I appreciate the priority you are giving this issue, not only today but going forward.

I realize that I've talked briefly with each of you individually regarding my concerns with our current situation. The reason you are here this morning is because I'm convinced each of you share my concerns and, more importantly, are willing to personally commit to do something about it.

Likewise, the reason that there are a couple of notable absences of people from my staff is due to the fact that they do not share my concerns, at least not to the degree of being prepared to take action. That doesn't necessarily mean that they aren't valuable staff members, but that they currently are not ready to take action. Over time, however, I will be expecting them to jump on board or they will be left behind.

Several recent occurrences and pieces of data have convinced me that we need to make some very fundamental changes in how we run our facility. First, we all know that Lou Jacobs broke his thumb when he tripped over clutter two weeks ago. We got lucky that the wakeup call was a fractured thumb. We all know from the condition of the maintenance crib that he could just as easily tripped and suffered a head injury.

Secondly, we received feedback this week that we lost the potential new business with Jacobsen Industries. Fortunately, they were forthright with their feedback on what drove their decision. They told us that, after touring both facilities, they simply felt more confident that our competitor could meet their needs ... despite a higher quoted price. When we asked for specific examples that led to that conclusion, they explained that we came off as being more disorganized and running by the seat of our pants.

Finally, I don't need to remind you that we are falling well short of our existing customers' goals for quality. As I visit with employees in both the office and the factory, it becomes readily apparent that we have what I will call a "cowboy culture." Individual law reigns; our posted Standard Work is little more than a box we've checked in order to say we are ISO-certified. We may be able to fool the