New Year's Resolution

DON'T FORGET

To Take Out The TRASH

By: Larry Girouard

It was in the fifties, but seems like yesterday. I can still hear the faint strains of my mother's voice saying "Don't forget to take out the trash". This was one of my chores. It wasn't one of my favorite things to do, but there was a price to pay if I forgot.

The trash was the waste our family generated each week, and for a family of five, it was significant. That said, with today's more throw-away society, it seems like the amount of waste I bring out to the curb each week seems much greater, and there are only two of us!

The bottom line is that you would never let trash accumulate in your home for very long, yet we allow trash to clutter our businesses every day in the form of waste in processes, and in the way we organize the things around us.

Since my first introduction into the world of Lean over 20 years ago, I have changed the way I look at a business. Perhaps my mechanical engineering background helps me frame that vision. It is so simple to get a clear picture of your business once you take away the emotions that encumber that view, and just look at the processes that make up all business activities.

Processes, routines, and habits are all the same. We all do things in a

in a certain way because this is the way we initially learned it, and there is a comfort the sameness of "we have always done it that way".

While most of my professional career was spent in the world of manufacturing with both fortune 500 companies like DuPont, and small high tech start-ups, process is not held captive by this manufacturing world. Regardless of the business model within the spectrum from manufacturing to service, it is all about the implementation of processes, and the integration of those processes to yield the product or service your market demands.

Processes are void of emotion ... A goes to B which goes to C, D, E, F, and so on. All processes can be mapped out in concrete form. All processes can be measured, with the most valuable measurement being time. How long does it take to go from A to B, B to C, etc.

You have heard the saying "time is money" over and over again. If processes, many of which have evolved over the years to become convoluted and cumbersome, are not viewed from the unemotional perspective of "time to execute", you are doing your business a huge disservice.

There is one thing I learned about Lean that you can take to the bank > every process has waste, and in most cases, a lot of waste. In reality, over time the degree of waste increases as process modifications are made to address this issue or that issue.

Here is a simple exercise that might help to punctuate how waste, or trash, impedes the ability to efficiently service your customer base:

1.) P**ick a process or activity that frustrates you that involves several people, and departments (functions), to execute.**

2.) Map out that process on a large piece of paper, or preferably on a white board. Process mapping is simplified by just following the paperwork, or communication trail, within that process. It is important that all the details be included. It is most revealing to map out a process using swim lanes. Think of a swimming pool with each swim lane representing a different function within your organization (sales, finance, QC, etc).

The process may serpentine between swim lanes several times before you get to the end. As that happens, the more obvious waste elements will "float" to the surface. (Note: It is of critical importance that you have the employees that are involved in the process help develop this map because they are the ones that do the work.)

3.) Once the Current State of the process is complete and all the stakeholders are comfortable with its correctness, the next step is to try to apply times to each step. Allocated times must include wait times to move information along, and not just the time to perform the actual work at each step. In this way, the total time for the process to be completed can be established. For example, if you are mapping out the quoting process, how long does it take from the time you received the RFQ from the customer to the time you deliver it back? This defines the overall process time. Better said, this is how long the customer is waiting for an answer.

4.) Determining the Future State > Take

out the trash, or waste: With the involvement of the employees, how might this process be stream-lined? As mentioned, this goes beyond just performing the actual required tasks more efficiently, but also must address wastes such as waiting transportation of information, prioritizing information and actions that come across an employee's desk, or work station, etc. Modifying the Current State of a process will result in dramatically reducing its time for completion, like this RFQ example. This will open up your eyes to the potential value of this approach.

5.) Mutual Exclusivity is Rare > As you begin to transform a process to a more efficient level, the actions of employees within that process will change. Some employees may well take on additional responsibilities in the new process while others will have less of a role. Because no process in an island, by default, this will impact other processes and job descriptions that, at some point, will need to be addressed.

The end game is to evolve to a more efficient company by eliminating (taking out) the trash, or waste, in all your business processes. This will positively impact your value proposition resulting in an improved top and bottom line.

Make a New Year's resolution to "take out the trash" in one key

process, and see what happens. There is no downside, and the upside potential is most rewarding.

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