

World Class Performance

In today's business world all successful companies implement strategies to help them get ahead and to stay ahead. Kaizen, Lean Manufacturing, and Six Sigma are all approaches that have proven to be successful in helping companies become and remain world class.

As effective as these strategies are, there is an element that is usually overlooked in the implementation of these programs - the human element. The word Kaizen means "continuous improvement". It comes from the Japanese words "Kai" meaning school and "Zen" meaning wisdom. In Japan Kaizen is applied to all aspects of a person's life and not just work. Its principles of constant incremental improvement and refinement are effective in non work environments but that area of an employee's life is generally considered to be outside of the scope of world class performance initiatives in the Western world. However, that does not mean that more attention cannot be given to the improvement of human performance or that the benefits gained by the employee cannot be carried over into private life.

Great strides have been taken over the last three decades in improving productivity. Lean manufacturing has led to substantial savings in inventory holdings and in job optimization. Six Sigma has led to refinements in processes and more efficient machinery. Kaizen implementations have helped more or less across the board by using the principle that all aspects of a business can be improved upon. All of these strategies have proven to be very effective but there is still more that can be done - improve the human element.

Moshe Feldenkrais has been credited with the quote "Movement is life. Life is a process. Improve the quality of the process and you improve the quality of life itself.". Movement is a part of any action that anyone takes - we all move all of the time. If a person's actions are considered to be part of a process, then it follows that an improvement in the actions performed will result in an improvement in the process. Actions are the result of thinking, feeling and moving. Process initiatives like Kaizen encourage improvement thinking and hopefully also motivate the employee. They also seek to minimize overly hard work and excessive effort. The methodologies used by ETM Consultants directly address the improvement in performance of the human element.

The way that we perform any action is based on our previous experience.

This is useful because it means that we don't have to constantly re-invent the wheel. A problem arises however, when previous experience has created habitual ways of doing things that are not the best way for the current situation. There are times when the old way just does not work in the changed conditions. In the case of movement the inability to adapt often leads to pain and reduced performance. Even when circumstances remain the same, using the same pattern of movement continuously can lead to repetitive stress injuries.

Movement re-education teaches a person to be aware of what is moving and what is not moving during any particular action. With this knowledge and awareness, the person is able to move in the most comfortable and efficient way to support the action being performed. The techniques used in movement re-education have parallels in Kaizen.

Kaizen involves everyone in an organization from top to bottom. Refined movement includes the whole body. An given muscle either supports an action by being contracted or relaxed appropriately or else it hinders the action by an inappropriate response.

Kaizen encourages small improvements on a regular basis. When learning how to optimize our movements it is best if we make small movements well within the limits of our capabilities. This is because small movements done slowly and with attention allow us to notice what we are doing; what is moving and what isn't. Small movements with attention also allow us to stay well within our range of comfort so that we can learn new ways without getting injured.

Kaizen seeks to improve productivity and safety and at the same time reduce waste. High quality movement has parallels with high quality manufacturing in this respect also. A quality movement is one that is done with maximum power (productivity), safety (comfort - no pain), and with minimum undue effort.

As soon as we learn to move better, we have created the conditions to further improve and move even better. Once this state of continuous improvement has been adopted, our physical wellbeing goes from strength to strength. AT the same time there is a tendency for our thinking to become clearer and for our outlook to improve since we are using fewer resources in moving poorly.

Efficient and comfortable movement for everyone in an organization is the next step for world class performers. ETM creates conditions for an engaged workforce that is able to do its job effectively and with a minimum of injuries.