

LEAN INSIGHTS

When is 5S Lean?

By Dr. Timothy D. Hill

5S— a procedure whose name is based on five Japanese words that start with “S” — is often used to start a Lean deployment:

- **Seiri** (“arrange things properly” or Sort) means to separate needed tools, parts, and instruction from unneeded materials and to remove the latter.
- **Seiton** (“keep things in their proper place” or Simplify) means to neatly arrange and identify parts and tools for ease of use.
- **Seiso** (“clean the workplace” or Scrub) means to conduct a clean-up campaign.
- **Seiketsu** (“maintain the above three principles”) means to Standardize to conduct Sort, Simplify and Scrub at frequent intervals to maintain a workplace in perfect condition.
- **Shitsuke** (“practice self-discipline and respect for fellow workers” or Sustain) means to form the habit of always following the first 5s.

5S steps include discarding unneeded tools/equipment, arranging the remainder in order and labelling them, cleaning and inspecting them, making this organization the norm and auditing.

Sometimes discarding unneeded items means doing a “red tag” exercise, often the initial step in the 5S sorting process where red tags are used to identify items that are not likely to be used. If they are not used within a specified time period, they are disposed of, thereby increasing space and organization.

However, 5S is not Lean, although it might be used to start a Lean process. There are two major reasons why 5S is not Lean:

1 The 5S exercise is not tied to anything. As a consequence, the 5S and Lean efforts will fail. A 5S exercise can be started with the intention of stabilizing the workplace and generally cleaning things up prior to a Lean deployment. However, the impetus is often lost without a Lean leader pushing things through and keeping momentum. One past client had tried a 5S, selected the “low-hanging fruit” (easy clean-up items) and then found that nothing happened after the 5S. In fact, things went back to how they were before and were the same if not worse.

Another reason for the failure of the 5S efforts is the belief that Lean starts and stops with the 5S. You may have a Lean leader, but if they cannot get to the Sustain part and tie the 5S efforts into a larger Lean initiative, the 5S will fail. One municipality started a large Lean effort and introduced nearly 100 area companies to Lean. However, these free sessions were limited to 5S and isolated kaizen blitz efforts. The result was that some firms found early 5S successes, but others did not. Eventually nearly all participants fell back to earlier performance levels.

2 The 5S exercise is tied to a kaizen blitz. Sometimes the 5S exercise is tied to the search for an improvement opportunity — a kaizen blitz. While walking the plant floor, the team can come upon a kaizen opportunity. They might quickly gather baseline data and then proceed to kaizen the process. Then they move on, frequently forgetting to manage (Sustain) the results. As a result, the gains are lost. So, too, is employee involvement as they live with the resultant ups and downs while management moves on to the next problem.

Recommendations for successful 5S

- Tie your 5S efforts to your visual workplace. Make public the gains you’ve made.
- Measure. The baseline (before) and after measurements are critical. You cannot show gains without both numbers.
- Tie your 5S efforts to your larger strategy. Show how the 5S efforts connect to your larger Lean deployment. Make a picture that shows the progression and present that picture where you’ve set up your visual display.

Follow through with 5S events such as red tagging. It’s not enough to put a red tag on something, you must remove the tagged item and then show measurable improvement — be it recovered space for more work, reduction in cycle time from no longer having to work around the tagged item, or the like.

In my experience, once I have delivered the initial Lean training I’ll start a 5S effort, but not before. We’ll have a Lean board (for visual display) in place, we’ll connect the 5S to the Lean game plan and we’ll report measurable successes. This way, the 5S truly paves the way for the Lean game plan.

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From the book shelf

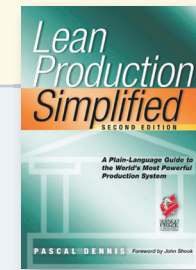
Lean Production Simplified: A Plain Language Guide To The World’s Most Powerful Production System by Pascal Dennis

THIS SECOND EDITION IS INFORMATIVE for all levels of Lean learners — from those just starting to those who feel they already have a good handle on Lean.

A lot of the previous Lean titles have tended to focus on sets of Lean tools. Some have paid more attention to the cultural aspects of Lean and change management. *Lean Production Simplified* is a good blend of both giving the reader not

only a systemic understanding of Lean but also the clear skill development required for leadership at all levels.

Dennis provides a comprehensive view of Toyota’s Lean manufacturing system and couples that with a look at the origins and underlying principles of Lean. He then goes on to talk about identifying the goals of Lean production and provides practical problem solving for Lean production. He then presents activities that support involvement: Kaizen circles, suggestion systems, and problem solving.



Dennis was referred to as “North America’s Ohno-san” by another reviewer, and that might not be too far off. Dennis has built convincingly on his Toyota Motor Manufacturing Canada experience.

WEB WATCH:

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Why can’t my 5S efforts stick?

Get Tim’s latest answer online in the Lean Manufacturing portal at www.automationmag.com.



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