Standardize

Overview of Module

In the context of 5S standardize is simply the result of doing the first three steps properly - namely sort, straighten, and sweep.

In fact, many companies actually refer to it as 3S and not 5S, while some call it 4S, and yet others add safety and call it 6S. And while none of these are wrong or better than the other it goes without saying that to excel at lean we must, at a minimum, master the sort, straighten, and sweep steps.

Along these lines, Taiichi Ohno, one of the chief architects of the Toyota Production System was fond of saying, "where there is no standard there can be no improvement." In other words, if there is no consistency to the way work is done how could one ever expect to improve it?

Another way off looking at it is all we're doing with this step is making what we want done VISUAL in nature so there's no guessing involved since making things in our factories, offices, and other places of work visual is essential to success of 5S as it helps everyone know what to do and how to do it. It also helps us identify when something is not right allowing us to implement a countermeasure immediately.

Why Standardize?

So in addition to these important facts, there is another extremely powerful reason standardization is so important.

This reason is the second law of thermodynamics, otherwise known as entropy. Now, if you force

yourselves to think back to your college or high school days you'll recall that entropy is a measure of the disorder in any system. Put another way, entropy helps us measure the energy that disperses or spreads out in a process.

So, for example, when you drive over a nail your tire eventually blows out. Here in Texas we like our backyard barbeques. And when I'm done cooking my food, my grill eventually cools off, even in the hot Texas air.

These are both examples of entropy at its best. With this said, when we sort, straighten, and sweep an area into a thing of beauty it's also entropy that does its very best to undo it. So you could say that this standardize step essentially keeps its eye on entropy and helps us continuously fight against it.

Examples and Techniques

As a quick review, visual management is used to make it clear what is "normal". This reduces discussion about what the standard should be. Standards can always be improved, but once a standard is set it's important to make it visual so that it's maintained. A good way to maintain and improve performance is to make the status visible.

There are many examples of visual management and standardization available including:

- Safety Crosses
- Color Coding Standards
- Standard Work Documents
- Standardized Cleaning Lists
- Location Control Marks
- Position Marks / Shadow Boards
- Standardized Filing / Diagonal Tape

There are some free standardized templates available for download in the resources section so please feel free to use them.

Key Terms

- Standardize: The result of doing the first three steps properly - namely sort, straighten, and sweep.
- Entropy: A measure of the disorder in any system.