

As you might guess, most organizations, whether they would like to admit it or not, have trouble when it comes to setting organizational direction or guidelines that are fair and equal to all employees. Consider the average employee handbook. Generally the “do nots” are what is highlighted, and these “do nots” are usually the result of past accidents or incidents that were caused by that proverbial 5 percent of the workforce that causes 95 percent of the organization’s grievances. This latter group is what we call CAVE people (citizens against virtually everything). When setting policy for an organization, if we are not careful we can fall into this trap of legislating based on what—or who, in some cases—hurts me the most.



The Kaizen Promotion Officer is the perfect choice for heading up all kaizen-related activities, from assessing the need for kaizens, to developing and preparing for them, and finally sustainment of results. But who can help get to the root cause of cultural issues that affect the success and sustainment of a company’s entire lean journey? We must first understand that the leadership staff does not always reflect the concerns or views of the total workforce. Whether or not a business is a union environment, kaizen works best when the team is a cross-functional group with cross-functional relationships, from several areas, reporting levels, and shifts within the organization. One good way to address this issue is to establish a steering committee.

In addition to ensuring cross-functionality and representation for all workers, a steering committee helps reinforce abnormality management and sustainment of results. The following outline provides the basics of steering committees.

What is a steering committee?

A steering committee is a collection of individuals from upper management and hourly ranks that is responsible for setting a strategic direction aimed at the successful implementation of lean manufacturing. The steering committee also enables personnel to follow the goals and expectations set forth by the committee.

Who are the steering committee members?

A steering committee should consist of an equal number of management and hourly personnel. The management team should consist of the plant manager and all area/department managers. The hourly team should include representation from all areas of the plant. If it is a union facility, the hourly personnel should consist of the plant chairman and the rest of the bargaining committee. The members of the KPO should attend meetings as a resource only, not as voting members of the plant steering committee.

What are the roles and responsibilities of the steering committee?

The steering committee should establish the vision of lean implementation for the facility and determine the best method for rolling out that vision throughout the plant. They should also be responsible for policy deployment, which includes establishing and providing needed tools and funding; setting plant objectives and strategies and providing guidance to the plant; weighing issues and making final decisions regarding implementation; being available as a resource when needed; and communicating activities to affected personnel. If it is a union facility, they should assure adherence to the local contract. The steering committee should approve an implementation timeline and follow up by setting interim goals and gauging progress of actual results versus set targets.

When should the steering committee meet?

The steering committee should meet at a predetermined day and time each week and the meeting should last no more than one hour. As the champion of lean implementation, the plant manager should conduct the meeting. If the plant manager isn’t available, a designated replacement should conduct the meeting.



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What information is communicated by the steering committee?

The steering committee should approve all communications generated by the Kaizen Promotion Office. The KPO should communicate the plant vision, goals, and objectives, as well as the progress of lean implementation, to everyone through newsletters, bulletin board postings, or internal video programming. Communications should also include policy changes, best practices, lessons learned, and resolutions to implementation concerns.

Lean transformation is a highly dynamic activity, one that is very difficult given the traditional levels of involvement of the leadership group alone. An effective steering committee can make sure that everyone at the plant understands why lean is being implemented and how it can make both the business and individual’s jobs better. It can make certain that everyone is pulling in the same direction and that everyone in the plant understands they are all part of one team. It can be the deciding factor in the successful start and sustainment of your lean journey. If you don’t already have a steering committee in place, consider establishing one—the success and longevity of your lean transformation may depend on it. ■