



Controlled Churn and Heat: The Ghee Recipe for Change Management

These carefully balanced conditioning, churning, and heating processes required to make ghee are a good analogy for effective change management (specifically, how a good kaizen coach helps teams find optimal solutions) and how senior managers should develop leadership capabilities.

Ghee is a type of clarified butter that's used frequently in Indian cooking and religious ceremonies. To extract it following traditional methods, boiled milk is turned into yogurt, which is then churned to obtain the cultured butter and simmered over the right level of heat with controlled stirring and removal of any solids residue. The ghee, then, can be stored unrefrigerated without becoming spoiled.

These carefully balanced conditioning, churning, and heating processes are a good analogy for effective change management, specifically, how a good kaizen coach helps teams find optimal solutions. It also describes how senior managers should develop leadership capabilities. When making ghee, if the milk is churned too fast or too slow, it won't produce the cultured butter needed to move on to the next step.

Similarly, the butter will not convert in to ghee or will burn if the heating and stirring is not controlled during the simmering process.

Likewise, a kaizen event team has to be carefully stirred to identify and align on the root level of the problem they're working on to maximize their creativity and find an optimal and sustainable solution. If the team is pushed too hard, as with any change management situation, they'll falter and break down. If they aren't pushed hard enough, they won't find the best solution.

Of course some teams, often for cultural and organizational reasons, are much more sensitive to too much heat and falling apart than others. It takes a deft and gently manipulative coach to bring and keep everyone together.

It's emotionally draining and frustrating to acknowledge chronic pains and waste, and struggle and ultimately find a sustainable solution during a kaizen event. But once the team reaches that point, and people feel and see the benefit of this controlled process, it generates the momentum needed for the solution to be fully implemented and sustained in subsequent weeks.

The ghee analogy applies to developing future leaders as well. Over the course of my career I've seen too many supervisors and functional leaders who have done excellent work in their current roles, and who were thus promoted to successively more challenging jobs—without any type of management skills nurturing—until they struggled miserably or failed. (Yes, this is the so-called “Peter Principle,” which says that leaders rise to their highest level of incompetence.

And, to continue our dairy theme, is the meaning behind the saying, “The cream rises to the top until it sours!”) When companies follow these “sink-or-swim” leadership development plans, they end up depleting their original talent pool. When these people leave it often demoralizes the remaining organization. In any market where talent is in short supply, this is a very shortsighted strategy. Hence, following a coaching type (sensei) mindset, senior leaders should control the churn and heat of these new leadership roles and mentor people to develop the necessary capabilities, so that potential future leaders don't end up failing, or effectively recover from their

failure and learn for the future.

In summary, managing change is hard whether you're leading teams or developing people. That's why it is essential to control the heat and churn during your search for optimal solutions and development of future leaders.



Ashwin Badve, Director of LeanSigma for Strategic Growth

Ashwin Badve is an accomplished lean quality systems leader with extensive experience in both manufacturing and back-office process improvement. He is one of our leading subject matter experts in lean product development.