

# Roots Grow Good Things, Too

## Continual improvement waste

by Mike Micklewright



**Question:** What do you call a root cause analyst?

**Answer:** A whys guy!

I had been summoned from my Chicago suburban home and office to visit a company in Wisconsin—Land of Cheese—to discuss the possibility of providing some lean training requested by the director of operations, Brent Favor. This was a company to which I had previously provided some training and consultation on ISO 9001 and ISO 14001.

Upon my arrival that cold and blustery winter morning (no wonder the cheese never grows mold up there), I was greeted by Brent. After passing through the halls and cubicles riddled with Green Bay Packers paraphernalia, we sat down in the conference room to discuss his specific needs.

After some idle chit-chat about the drive up north, the weather and the Bears-Packers game, Brent said that he'd like for me to prepare a proposal to provide *kaizen* and total productive maintenance (TPM) training to a number of employees.

"And why is it that you would like *kaizen* and TPM training?" I asked him. He said, "Well, we would like to be more like Toyota, and I have been given the goal of saving \$400,000 from lean activities by the end of the year. I figure that these training classes would help us get there the quickest."

After some more discussion on timing, the number of participants and the content of the training, I recommended, "How about you integrate the use of these tools into your quality management system (QMS)? You know, we can develop work instructions on how to perform a *kaizen* event and how to do TPM and have them referenced from your corrective and preventive action procedure and process control procedure, respectively."

Brent shuddered and stopped me before I could finish the last word, "Nope, nope, nope, nope. That wouldn't fly here. The president wants lean to have nothing to do with ISO. He wants this to be fresh; he doesn't want it to be tainted with that ISO stuff."

As I drove home after the meeting, I blasted my old Bruce Springsteen "Born to Run" CD to help keep my eyes open, since the Land of Cheese doesn't even have toll booths to interrupt the long drive back home. I couldn't wait to cross over into Illinois once again, so that I could at least briefly stop and talk to the toll booth attendant.

While Bruce was singing, I thought about how I would develop the proposal and the content of the training sessions to match Brent's needs. My imagined proposal, however, kept getting interrupted by several other thoughts about what had transpired during our meeting and the shame of it all.

### Roots grow good things, too

Did Brent and the company's top management ever stop to think why Toyota is so successful? When companies do well, why don't people perform a root cause analysis to find out why? Why do we only perform a root cause analysis when something doesn't work?

If Brent and others did perform a root cause analysis on the success of the Toyota Production System, they wouldn't discover that TPM, *kaizen* or, for that matter, 5S, quick changeover or value-stream mapping were the root causes. These tools didn't exist and were only byproducts of the TPS.

One might find that the root causes of Toyota's success include the development of a lean culture, constant focus on reduction of waste, respect and involvement of all employees, and living in the spirit of W. Edwards Deming's 14 principles.

### **Waste in continual improvement**

Does the company's president truly not understand that the purpose of lean and ISO 9001 is to improve business processes continually? Can top-level people truly be so ignorant as not to see the relationship between continual improvement processes? Do they truly not understand that developing multiple continual improvement processes, with duplication in effort and resources, is in itself wasteful and confusing? Are they unaware that the improvements made via lean activities are done through effective root cause analysis, just as in the corrective and preventive action system of their QMS, and that improvements will have to be controlled through the QMS?

### **What would Deming say?**

Does the president not understand that setting numerical and monetary goals without a plan is useless? Attending classes on TPM and *kaizen* isn't a plan. These tools can be used to achieve a plan, but they aren't the plan itself. As Deming stated in *Out of the Crisis* (The MIT Press, 2000), "Management by numerical goal is an attempt to manage without knowledge of what to do, and in fact is usually management by fear." And "To manage, one must lead. To lead, one must understand the work that he and his people are responsible for." The goal the company president gave Brent violated Deming's point No. 11b, "Eliminate numerical goals for people in management."

The president focused on the end of the stream, the end product and the dollar savings, rather than on the beginning of the stream—leadership.

What would happen after the training? Most probably, Brent would find a way to show a \$400,000 savings, one way or another, because he fears a poor performance appraisal and the loss of his job. The savings might not have anything to do with TPM or *kaizen* events, it might not be real savings, it might not benefit the company and the employees. It might be due to reallocating resources and expenses to different accounts, creative accounting, getting rid of resources—including people—or a host of other reasons. It doesn't matter in the long run; it only matters that Brent show a \$400,000 savings and somehow tie it in with TPM and *kaizen* events.

Ever the good consultant, I went back to my office, drew up a proposal and sent it to Brent. Then I played the game of constant follow-up, hearing over and over again, "We're not ready yet to do the training." Months later Brent was fired, and the project died.

In the spirit of lean and continual improvement, this is most justified.

### **About the author**

*Mike Micklewright is president of [QualityQuest Inc.](#), a Chicago-based consulting, training and facilitation company specializing in lean, ISO 9001, ISO/TS 16949, Six Sigma, and their integration. Micklewright is an ASQ-certified Six Sigma Black Belt, quality auditor, quality engineer and quality manager. He holds a degree in general engineering from the University of Illinois and has worked in design, manufacturing, and quality engineering for the Saturn Corp. of General Motors and SeaquistPerfect Dispensing. Mike is a sought-after speaker and has had many articles published. He also performs stand-up comedy in which he makes fun of the world of continual improvement and has developed, produced, acted in, and sells video training programs.*