



# KAIZEN EVENTS MADE SIMPLE

## SMALL STEPS LEAD TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

**W**e hear a lot in manufacturing regarding “kaizen,” a Japanese word meaning “incremental improvement.”

Kaizen was formalized by the Toyota Production System, which is now utilized throughout the United States in lean manufacturing. The word Kaizen is broken down this way: “Kai” – Change, “Zen” – for the good.

The term “Kaizen” is the process broadly defined. “Kaizen event” is the term given to a highly focused continuous improvement event consisting of a team working together for a brief time period to solve a business problem.

Kaizen teams normally consist of four to seven individuals from all relevant departments or areas. Kaizen

events are short-term, hard-hitting efforts to improve a defined process. The Kaizen event could focus on any business opportunity. It could be a line redesign, SMED (Single-Minute Exchange of Die has now become an acronym for events which remove time from a process), setup reduction event, speed improvement, cycle time reduction, waste reduction, 5S event, equipment realignment or any other issue. Kaizen events are also conducted in service industries such as hospitals, banks and other non-manufacturing businesses.

### PLAN: SET THE EVENT AND GOALS

A kaizen event is similar to a brainstorming exercise, at least in the beginning stages.

At Council Tool we have used Kaizen events in many areas. One

specific process has been forge setups. We use the SMED method in these events. We first establish a base line so that we understand the average time a setup requires. Next we hold a planning session, which often times includes video of the process. We then develop our objective and determine how long the project will take to complete.

### DO: EXECUTE AND SET NEW BASELINES

The projects often lead to major gains, but more often, small time savings are realized. These add up as additional improvements are made. Small improvements can lead to bottlenecks being eliminated or reduced, which can result in large savings of time, money or both.

Simple actions are important. For example, marking the floor can help

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make a process repeatable because a box or equipment is placed in the same spot each time. This not only gives a defined place for items, it sets a baseline for future projects.

The important point is defining the project. Measure the current state prior to starting the event and involve those departments that can positively affect the change goal.

Many areas can benefit from Kaizen, but initially, is it best to pick projects that show immediate improvement. This will get the continuous improvement process off to a good start. Continuous improvement

is not a part-time endeavor; it is an all-encompassing corporate focus.

### CHECK: DOCUMENT THE RESULTS

There is generally one piece of paper containing all pertinent information concerning the events, including:

- Mission statement with objective
- Team members, leader and management sponsor
- Current problem statement
- Resources required
- Expected completion date
- Results
- Sign-offs

### ACT: SHARE THE SUCCESS

It is important to celebrate and share success from Kaizen events. Don't forget to involve the people whose jobs have changed. They helped make the company better, and deserve to share in the celebration. **CS**

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