

Using Standard Work to Best Serve Customers

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If our shop's mission is the creation, protection and provision of goods and services to customers, what are the means that we use to do this? By what means can we use to ensure that our entire organization is performing to sustain the customer's demand that sustains our organization? In order to assure that our organization as a whole achieves our goals, we must choose a means that reflects the entire organization's provisions of goods and services. I have assembled some information from a variety of sources to help me make the case that our shops need to have a standard work process for both how we provide products and serve our customers.

Why Standard Work?

Standard work has been rigorously applied in manufacturing production, with the result being some of the highest achieved quality available today. Toyota, a pioneer of the application of standard work through its Toyota Production System, is benchmarked as best-in-class by all of its peers and competitors throughout the world for high quality, high productivity, manufacturing speed and flexibility.

“At UPS, the standard work discipline of no left turns delivers results to the bottom line, while better meeting customer demand, increasing the safety of drivers and the public and reducing the resources used.”

According to Velaction, "...Standard work (often called standardized work) is the cornerstone of any continuous improvement effort. It locks in gains and provides a foundation for future advances. Standard work helps companies reach their improvement targets, but also provides a stable, reasonable working environment for frontline employees."

Link: velaction.com/standard-work

Standard work is a means to provide stability and consistency throughout an organization. It is essential if we



are to provide consistent performance. It provides the basis upon which we can launch our continuous improvement efforts. In his book, "The Toyota Way," Jeff Liker describes the importance of standard work to the Toyota Production System (TPS): "Standardized tasks and processes are the foundation for continuous improvement and employee empowerment." This can be restated, "Having the right process will produce the right results." Do we have a "right process" for dealing with customer service issues?

Lean.org puts it this way: "Standardized work is one of the most powerful but least used lean tools. The benefits of standardized work include ... reductions in variability, easier training of new operators, reductions in injuries and strain, and a baseline for improvement activities ... Standardizing the work adds discipline to the culture, an element that is frequently neglected, but essential for lean to take root."

Link: short.productionmachining.com/standardwo

Standard work is employed in manufacturing organizations in order to drive out variation and to fine tune production processes, improving quality by eliminating variation, waste and employee confusion. Standard work reduces variation by reducing the number of choices that an employee has to make to complete an essential task. By reducing the number of unnecessary choices, standard work enables the performer to perform the needed task without any confusion or doubt regarding which tool or implement to use, and it saves time and wasted effort picking up the incorrect device. Standard work has resulted in many organizations' performance achieving some of the highest quality available today.

Continued on page 20

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Continued from page 18

Not Limited to Manufacturing Processes

United Parcel Service (UPS) uses a variant of standard work to minimize the number of left turns that its delivery drivers have to make each day.

“UPS engineers found that left-hand turns were a major drag on efficiency. Turning against traffic resulted in long waits in left-hand turn lanes that wasted time and fuel, and it also led to a disproportionate number of accidents. By mapping out routes that involved ‘a series of right-hand loops,’ UPS improved profits and safety while touting their catchy, environmentally friendly policy. As of 2012, the right turn rule, combined with other improvements, UPS saved around 10 million gallons of gas and reduced emissions by the equivalent of taking 5,300 cars off the road for a year.”

Link: short.productionmachining.com/upsnoleft

UPS itself explains the value of their standard work for avoiding no left turns: “Even if this meant traveling a greater distance, results showed that more packages could be delivered in less time with reduced emissions by driving in a series of right-hand loops. It helped the bottom line, met consumer demands and increased safety.”

Link: short.gardnerweb.com/upsright

By creating standard work to eliminate problematic left turns, UPS, “helped the bottom line, met consumer demands and increased safety.” The standard work discipline delivers results to the bottom line, while better meeting customer demand, increasing the safety of drivers and the public, while reducing the resources used. This is the power of standard work.

Enable Your Performers

Our customer service performers struggle with ambiguity as to their role when an unexpected issue arises. Many times they find themselves forced to choose between activities that deliver customer satisfaction, deliver some social good or those that maximize employer profits.

Standardization can be an enabler for an organization. As managers, we need to provide our performers with standard tools to enable their work with customers, tools that provide both the structure to assure that the customer’s and the organization’s needs are met. At the same time, we need to make sure we do not stifle our performer’s ability to innovate and be creative. Frozen, rigid practices can only assure that service to our customers does not keep up with the ever-changing demands of our customers and the marketplace.

We have standard work for our shop processes. Standard work has helped us bring our shop processes to quality levels unimaginable 10 years ago. Is it time now to help our team develop standard work for customer care and sustainment? I believe it is essential for us as managers to provide clarity to our performers on what is the right balance between enforcing our policies and serving the needs of both the customer and our organization. Currently, what means are available to let them know how to do just that? They have the responsibility, but do they have the authority? Standard work just might be the enabling means to help us help our performers walk that tightrope between our policies and our customers’ urgent requirements. Have you considered implementing standard work for customer service?

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