The Gemba Walk Barometer

 During the process of Lean transformation, there is arguably no better way to track progress made than through the use of performance measuring Visual Controls Boards (VCBs) and a regimented Gemba Walk routine. As many leaders of successful companies will attest, the combination of VCBs (most notably SQDC format) and the daily Gemba walk provides invaluable information on the past, current as well some future indicators of performance levels.

The data presented and discussed at the Gemba Walks not only tells an analytical story of past, present and future expectations of performance, but also provides the keen Leader incredible insight into the current and future leadership opportunities for the area under review.

Having successfully led or consulted on many Lean Transformation efforts, I have developed a tool that provides an indication of the level of Lean Transformational maturity leaders exhibit. I call this tool “The Gemba Walk Barometer”. Simply put, the Gemba Walk Barometer is a way to measure and track how committed and dedicated leaders are to the Lean Transformation by using the daily Gemba Walk as a data source.

Before diving into the details of how the Gemba Walk Barometer works, I would like to share some common questions that I consider as I observe and learn from daily Gemba walks.

* Why is the data not up to date or not accurate?
* Why is the presenter talking about the data and not focusing on counter-measures?
* Why are there no counter measures to missed targets?
* Why do performance trends not align with CI / Kaizen activities?
* Why do the performance targets not reflect Continuous Improvement?
* Why is there little productive dialog / interaction with the group during the Gemba walk?
* Why do Gemba walks not happen when the senior leader is absent?
* Who is answering the tough questions and what is the quality of the responses?
* Who has ownership for the results?
* Who is present and not present at the Gemba Walk?
* Is everyone actively listening and participating or are there “Gemba Walk Passengers”?
* What is the overall mood of the group post Gemba Walk?

 To begin with, I think we can all agree that the success of a Lean Transformation is greatly influenced by the words and actions of the Leadership team. It has been my experience that the quality and effectiveness of the Gemba Walk has a direct correlation to the Leadership team’s commitment, passion and dedication to establishing and fostering the desired Continuous Improvement Culture.

As stated earlier, the Gemba Walk Barometer is a tool I use to measure the leadership Team’s or individual leader’s genuine adoption level of the Lean Continuous Improvement Culture. To establish the barometer, I follow these steps:

1. In concert with the leadership team, an agreed upon structure for the VCBs and the Gemba Walks are established.
2. Once the required training has been completed and the initial implementation “teething pains” have been overcome, the Leadership team establishes the ideal / desired answers to the above questions. A weighting of importance scale is then applied to each of the question (1 =low, 2 = medium, 3 = high). This information is then used to form the targets for Lean adoption levels.
3. Over the course of about two weeks, observations are made during the daily Gemba Walk to determine the “current state” answers to the above questions.
4. At the end of the two weeks evaluation period, the observations are tabulated and a maturity rating is established for each of the questions, usually on a scale of 0 (not in alignment with the ideal state) to 4 (at or surpassing the ideal state).
5. By multiplying the previously determined weighting and the maturity rating for each question, their products are compared to the previously established ideal state. To gain an overall maturity level, the values for all questions are summed and the total compared to the ideal- state value. This maturity level value is then recorded on the barometer and opportunities for improvement are identified.
6. The barometer reading is then presented to the leadership team and/or individual leader, for review of process improvement opportunities, additional training needs and Lean Leadership Continuous Improvement activities.
7. In alignment with the culture of Continuous Improvement, this process is periodically repeated and the progress tracked.

After reading this article you may be thinking that the process is over simplified and could not possibly provide the value you are looking for. You are absolutely correct! As written, the above description provides the most basic framework of the Gemba Walks Barometer. To realize the maximum accuracy of the tool, the process and perhaps even the questions may need to be customized to reflect your unique situation and challenges your business faces.

To learn more about the Gemba Walk Barometer and how it can provide value to your Lean Leadership transformation send your questions to AJS.Lean.Solutions@gmail.com. Let’s start a conversation by visiting our website at www.AJS-Lean-Solutions.com.