Prerequisites to Standard Work

A Stable Process

In this lesson we’re going to discuss the prerequisites that must be in place before standard work can be successfully implemented.

The first thing that’s required to implement Standard Work is a stable process. In earlier Gemba Academy courses we learned about the 4M which stands for man, material, machines, and method. As it turns out, the last M, method, represents the standard work that’s developed after the first 3 M are stabilized. To be sure, Standard Work should NOT be attempted until the first 3M are stable and in control.

4 Leadership Prerequisites

Next, there are four main prerequisites from a leadership point of view that need to be in place before Standard Work is implemented.

• The first is organizations must adopt a blame free culture ensuring all associates are empowered to make improvements to existing standards.

• Next, a commitment to continuously improve the standard must be in place. In other words, all associates – no matter their rank in the organization – should be encouraged to continuously attack the status quo through relentless continuous improvement.

• The next prerequisite that must be in place is the habit of going to see problems with our own eyes while also leveraging visual management controls as shown here in order to quickly identify abnormalities.

• Finally, the 4th leadership prerequisite is to ensure a quick response / andon response system is in place. We’ll talk more about this in later modules but many lean thinking companies empower their employees to pull the andon cord when they see a problem. This pulling of the andon may eventually lead to the entire assembly line coming to a complete stop until the problem is addressed as supervisors and team leads work with the associated to identify the root cause of an issue.

And to be clear, a response system doesn’t have to be on a production line. The idea of empowering associates to stop what they are doing when something isn’t right, no matter the type of work, is at the heart of a true lean management system.