

OBSERVE WHAT IS REALLY HAPPENING

By Harold Chapman

GO AND SEE

Genchi Gembutsu is a Japanese word that can be translated as “to go and see.” This phrase is used to encourage people to go out to where the work is being done and observe what is really happening. All too often, we see managers trying to solve the problems in the process by sitting in the conference room, which is not where the problems are occurring. By going to the floor to “see for oneself,” one can uncover a much deeper understanding of the problems.

Taichi Ohno, the creator of the Toyota Production System, would use this method to train new graduates that came to his factories. As the story goes, he would draw a circle, using chalk, on the floor and have the graduate stand there for a few hours. He would then check back with the graduate to see what was observed. If the graduate hadn’t observed much, he would have him stand there for more time. The intent was to impress on the graduate that the only way to understand what was truly happening was to go where the value is being added and look for signs of waste through direct observation.

The concept of Genchi Gembutsu is very much in alignment with all of the Lean Principles and is a key part of the problem solving process. If the problem exists on the shop floor then it needs to be understood and solved at the shop floor.

In some organizations, Genchi Gembutsu, is also referred to as Management By Walking Around (MBWA). However, the concept of Genchi Gembutsu can be lost if all one does is walk around with a list and not stop to observe what is really happening. To truly practice Genchi Gembutsu, we must pause while at the work, focus on what is happening around us, identify problems and ask questions.

FINGERTIP CLOSE

It is extremely important to go and see for ourselves to thoroughly understand the situation. This allows us to:

- Solve problems and improve processes by going to the source and PERSONALLY observing and verifying data.
- Think and speak based on PERSONALLY verified data.



FINGERTIP CLOSE, Continued

Even high-level managers and executives should do and see things for themselves, so they will have more than a surface understanding of the situation. We like to call this getting “fingertip close” to the problem.

Some warning signs of not practicing Genchi Gembutsu are:

- Speaking about a problem based on feelings (I feel like, I think, I believe, my gut tells me, etc.), spreadsheet data and not facts.
- Trying to solve a machine problem in the boardroom and not at the machine.
- Trying to solve a service issue in the boardroom and not the field.
- Assuming what the root cause of the problem (and countermeasure) is based on past experience, rather than current facts.

The best way to understand the problem and convert our data into facts is to go see for ourselves. MLB Hall of Famer Yogi Berra summed it up nicely when he stated, “You can observe a lot just by watching.”

When was the last time you “Genchi Gembutsu’d” yourself out to where the real value is being added to your product or service? If not recently, perhaps this article is the start of more pauses and observation in your company. We encourage you to learn more about Genchi Gembutsu and it’s practical application in your operation. Let us know if there is an opportunity where LMSPI can help, you are welcome to learn more at www.LMSPI.com.