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The Elements Of Performance



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The success of many lean initiatives depends on achieving and sustaining behavior change. As a result Lean Manufacturing personnel are among the most vocal supporters of training; but a detailed analysis of the elements of performance might lead us to a broader perspective of behavior change - one in which training plays a smaller role than we may have previously thought. Consider the following:

» Case Study - Liquids Overfill Problem, Consumer Goods Manufacturer

A global consumer goods manufacturer recently asked us to help them resolve an overfill problem. The client explained that they were experiencing overfills on several of their liquids lines, which was costing this plant approximately \$900,000 per annum. Management's first step after discovering the problem had been to confirm that their filling machines were properly calibrated and capable of filling within specifications. They were. Management then organized training sessions for their liquid line operators to ensure their personnel knew how to properly monitor and adjust fill weights. All operators were trained and deemed competent.

Yet, the overfill problem continued...

So, why was this client experiencing overfills on lines with capable operators and equipment? Why hadn't training resolved the problem?

» The elements of performance:

Every performance, from filling a bottle to changing over a machine, is a combination of ability and desire. In other words, in order to perform a given task I need the ability (skills and knowledge) necessary to complete the task, and the desire (attitudes and beliefs) necessary to support my performance. If one or more of these elements of performance is missing, then the performance itself suffers: below is a common example of this that you might recognize.

Picking up new responsibilities - a senior operator was asked to take on an additional responsibility. The operator reluctantly agreed, but their subsequent performance of the task was poor. When the team leader raised this performance issue with the operator, the operator responded fairly emotionally saying "There are a lot of other people around here that could do it and they're not half as busy as I am". In the team leader's mind the issue was clear - while this operator was capable of performing the task and had done so in the past, the operator's underlying belief was that it was unfair for them to be asked to do so, hence, they did not perform it to their ability.

There are three key points to take away from this example, they are:

Key point: Equity or fairness is one of the strongest motivators. While

people will put up with perceived inequity for a period of time, the long term perception of inequity can be very damaging.

Key point: It is important to note that *what we see as reality is shaped by our beliefs*. This is why two people can see the exact same event and come away with different interpretations. A good example is the drawing below.

Is this a drawing of an old lady or a young lady? Our perception shapes our reality...



Key point: Beliefs can change as a result of new information. In the above drawing the nose of the old lady forms the jaw line and side of the young lady's face. Conversely, the young lady's jaw line and face form the old lady's nose. With this information your perceptions of this drawing can change.

In this case the Team Leader had assessed the relative workloads and knew them to be fair, thus his challenge was to present the senior operator with information that allowed the operator *to perceive his workload as fair* in relation to the workloads of his team mates.

» **Going back to our case study . . .**

Our client's filling machine operators had proven their ability to operate the filling machines, so we focused our enquiries on supporting skills and knowledge, and their attitudes and beliefs with regard to fill weights.

Here is where things really got interesting . . .

One of the reasons our client had a good idea of the size of their overfill problem was that they had recently implemented Statistical Process Control (SPC) on their filling lines. The goal was to provide operators with information that would enable them to better control the process. However, as we took a closer look at the overfill problem we realized that a combination of long-held beliefs regarding overfills and deficient SPC knowledge were actually combining to create the overfill problem!

Operators were making unnecessary adjustments based on their previous experience rather than making adjustments based on the rules of SPC. Furthermore, as overfills are still saleable product many operators were choosing to err on the high side - believing that MORE PRODUCT was actually perceived as better value by the customer.

To address these issues we structured a series of exercises that:

1) clearly established the statistical criteria necessary before corrective action should be taken, and ensuring that operators understood this, and;

2) helped the operators discover that perceptions of quality and value result primarily from consistency, and that while their efforts were well intentioned, the resulting variability in fill weights not only costs the plant profits, but lead to negative customer perceptions of the product.

The overfill problem was resolved.

So the next time you're involved in resolving a production issue or performance problem, keep in mind that perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs can have an enormous impact on performance, and ask yourself "what are the elements necessary for this performance?"

If you have any questions about The Elements of Performance, or if you would like to discuss a situation you are facing please feel to contact your nearest Talsico representative.

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