

Expert Tips & Tactics

Kaizen

I'm sure that you are familiar with the idea that "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" or "Leave well enough alone." What if we are missing the point? Just suppose for a moment that even though it ain't broke, it might be possible to make it better. Suppose that well enough...isn't. What then?

I want to chat about Kaizen and our businesses.

Kaizen is a Japanese word that relates to incremental improvement. It is often translated as "change for the better." The Japanese word "Kai" means school and the word "Zen" means wisdom. It is most often associated with corporations and corporate management, but it can be taken to apply just as well at a personal level. In some respects you can look at kaizen as a way of life as well as a business paradigm.

So let's think in terms of:

- Lean Production: Maintaining current performance levels but with increasing efficiency, resulting in no wastage of either time or resources.
- Ownership: Non-judgmental ownership of mistakes and errors as well as areas of potential improvement. Not being interested in parceling out blame or pointing fingers, but investing effort into improving the process by which results are achieved.
- Process innovation: Continuous, incremental improvement. Look at it like this: If I spend my time worrying about getting better results, but do nothing about how I achieve those results, I will be spinning my wheels. Conversely, if I look at the process by which I achieve my results, and make improvements to the way I do things, the results will take care of themselves.

The first step is to make the strategic decision that no day will go by without making some improvement in some aspect of your life *process*. Is your 'team' getting you where you want to go? Is the process you are using producing the results you want?

Once you know the answers to these questions you can move on to some work on your life or your business.

- Step One. Clean and Lean: Sort things out. Clear out the clutter from your life, physically, mentally and emotionally. Keep a tidy world. Know where your stuff is! Do not indulge in waste either of time or resources. Make everything count. Look for value in the action. What are you supposed to be doing with your time and resources, talents and abilities? Are you doing these things?
- Step Two. Systematize and Simplify: Arrange what will get done and a time line by which it will be done. Create systems for getting things done. I'm a pragmatist. I like systems to be as simple as possible, but no simpler. (I got that line from Einstein.) Work patterns that are needlessly complex create opportunities for confusion, doubt and error.
- Step Three. Discipline and Commitment: You must have the self-discipline to follow through and to keep following through. There is always room for improvement and no matter how good we think we might be at something, there is always something that can be done to improve things. Granted, there is a threshold of performance beyond which you get into a case of diminishing returns. But at these times, the possibility of wholly new and unforeseen paradigms emerges. It takes discipline and commitment to stay the course.

In conclusion, Kaizen is a path that allows us to take ownership of where we are *right now* and to do something each and every day to move us towards where we wish to be.

There is no room for criticism, condemnation or complaint in Kaizen. Kaizen is dynamic, affirmative and progressive.

Kaizen is the path of people who are not satisfied with “good enough.” Kaizen is the path for people who want to discover their full potential and from that perspective, Kaizen is very exciting. Kaizen is a deliberate choice and a determined effort, especially at first. Later, the practice of Kaizen becomes intuitive and instinctive. Once we commit to Kaizen, we find ourselves looking for a better way of doing something without thinking about it or apportioning blame or beating ourselves up over some perceived failure or error. We see what can be improved and we set about improving it, one step at a time. Kaizen is the school of wisdom!

How is your life doing? How is your business?

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