

November 9, 2011

Wednesday's Words of Quality

Go and See

The Deming approach to quality and the PDCA cycle attributed to him were appreciated by the Japanese in the early 1950s as a *"way of thinking and managing rather than simply as techniques."*

In the strategic basis for improvement defined as the Improvement Kata, according to Mike Rother in his text Toyota Kata, "Toyota later added the words "Go and See" to the middle of the PDCA wheel."



This act of 'going and seeing' is critical to observe actual conditions for yourself and not to fall into the manager's trap of jumping to conclusions. This must be the beginning of understanding a situation before suggestions for change can be made effectively.

The 4 key points of the Improvement Kata, founded in PDCA, deal with scientific experimentation, discovery and learning. This is how the culture changes for people from one of hiding and blame to one of openness and learning. At its core, this approach to problem solving relies on development of people with insight and process repair closest to the level of the actual work. The 4 points of this problem solving routine defined by Rother are:

1. *"Adaptive and evolutionary systems by their very nature involve experimentation."*

In our experience, there is no one right answer, no one fix to a problem, just many tweaks on the way to a target condition whose path is largely unknown. Just try something. Let the data tell you if it is with accepting as a change in process. Given the right leadership and organizational structure, the workplace is your experimental playground to figure out how to do the work better. In the Henry Ford Production System, this is the basis of your empowerment.

2. *"Hypotheses can only be tested by experiment, not by intellectual discussion, opinion, or human judgement."*

Don't talk, test! What you believe or think is less important than what you try. But try a pilot first, test usually on a small scale.

3. *"In order for an experiment to be scientific it must be possible that the hypothesis will be refuted."*

Never assume that the change implemented will work as intended and should be accepted as originally designed. That assumption will stop improvement and adaptation in its tracks. The fluid nature of continuous improvement is an adjustment for most who adopt this approach to work and problem solving.

4. *"When a hypothesis is refuted this is in particular when we can gain new insight and further develop our capability."*

Dr. Rother elaborates further on these concepts:

"We learn from failures because they reveal boundaries in our current capability and horizons in our minds. This is why Toyota states that 'problems are jewels.' They show us the way forward to a target condition. You need to miss the target periodically (again, preferably on a small scale that does not affect the customer) in order to see the appropriate next step."

... "This is a fascinating point when you consider how much we as leaders, managers, and executives try to make it look like everything is going right as planned. The main reason for conducting an experiment is not to test if something will work, but to learn what will not work as expected, and thus what we need to do to keep moving forward."

"No Problem" = A Problem

Rother also observes that *"If there is no problem, or it is made to seem that way, then our company would, in a sense, be standing still... The idea is to not stigmatize failures, but to learn from them."*

"We hear about Toyota's success, but not about its thousands of small failures that occur daily, which provide a basis for that success. Toyota makes hay of problems every day, where we tend to hide little problems until they grow into big and complex problems that are then difficult to dissect. Toyota has mastered the art of recognizing problems as they occur, analyzing their nature, and using what it learns to adapt and keep moving toward its target condition."

To some, the writings of Mike Rother quoted above may seem to be an academic construct that cannot be realized. However, the philosophy and reality of this manner of working is supported by what we have accomplished in the laboratories of the Henry Ford Health System through the management structures and culture of an empowered workforce we have created and the principles, rules and tools we have adapted from manufacturing to our own healthcare environment.

In this approach to problem solving our own Henry Ford said it better yet-

"There are no big problems, just a lot of little ones." -Henry Ford

This is a different way of thinking- finding the little problems proactively at the level of the work and empower the workforce to resolve them, continually.

But do encourage those you have empowered to "Go and See". This is an important early step of problem solving in order to move from assumption or accusation to an understanding of root cause.

References

Rother M. Toyota Kata. Managing People for Improvement, Adaptiveness and Superior Results. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010.

