

How Leaders Maintain the Vitality of a Lean Program

Maintaining the momentum from the early stages of a lean implementation can be challenging. Business leaders at all levels play a crucial role in sustaining a lean program. Here are some tactics that can help the organization maintain the vitality of a lean program and deliver long-term results.

Communicate metrics and current performance.

- **Visual management tools** show employees how their efforts are contributing to the bigger picture. Performance can be tracked manually on a whiteboard or electronically displayed.
- **Stand-up meetings** are an effective way to get everyone up to date and to identify potential obstacles impeding progress. They are less than 15 minutes and are held standing up.

Motivate employees.

- **Employee empowerment** provides an opportunity for employees to take responsibility and engage in continuous improvement activities. *Encourage* employees even if their ideas may fail; failure provides an opportunity for accountability and problem solving.
- **Teamwork** is a necessary aspect of continuous improvement. Working together to improve processes and solve problems generates trust and, in turn, a culture that will improve business.
- **Recognize** employees for their contribution to continuous improvement. Implementing a system for gathering continuous improvement ideas encourages participation and provides a platform for evaluating ideas and acknowledging contributions.

Provide ongoing training and learning.

- **Training programs** are not just for new hires. Have a plan to educate all levels of employees on improvements and process changes. It is important that those facilitating training have the necessary skills for effective and efficient transfer of knowledge.
- **Cross-training** employees provides an opportunity to share ideas for processes outside their primary area. It helps break down functional boundaries and provoke mutual trust and respect.

Remain involved in continuous improvement efforts.

- **Gemba Walks** are an opportunity for leaders and other employees to observe a process (not employee performance) and see first-hand areas for improvement. During a gemba walk, employees are asked about their contribution to continuous improvement, next steps and obstacles. Consistent gemba walks enforce a continuous improvement mindset.
- **Participate** in continuous improvement activities such as problem solving and kaizen events. This shows the company's commitment to the continuous improvement culture and initiatives.