

## Ensuring Production Toolbox Meetings are Effective

When implementing Continuous Improvement (CI), effective communication is crucial for success. Leon Thebus, **CI Manager at B&D Doors & Openers – Kilsyth VIC** and Paul Furtado, CTPM Senior Navigator Victoria, discussed this notion in greater detail throughout their presentation “Ensuring Production Toolbox Meetings are Effective” at the 2012 TPM & Lean Annual Forum.

Both Leon and Paul have vast experience with TPM<sup>3</sup>, Paul pointing out that “Leon has been doing CI since before it was cool.”

**Figure 1 – Paul and Leon presenting @ the Forum**



Leon introduced his section of the presentation with B&D’s universal goal to be the premium garage door and shutter supplier in Australia by:

- Providing a safe and rewarding workplace;
- Delivering a high level of service and quality; and
- Creating value for shareholders.

Kilsyth have built upon this vision by creating their own Improvement Mission to become a showpiece operation for B&D by December 2012. By maintain a clean factory, developing clear standards across the workplace and becoming a preferred employer.

In order to achieve these goals, B&D have created an Improvement Roadmap that includes, as put by Paul, some “fairly aggressive targets”. By 2015, the Kilsyth team hope to:

- Achieve Level 3 of the 5 Level Milestone TPM<sup>3</sup> Excellence Award;
- Standardised Work Practices;
- Create an incident and hazard free work place;
- Develop a SWAT like Maintenance team with less than 5% breakdowns; and
- Gain involvement from all employees.

However, Leon explained that an **effective Communication Framework** is necessary to achieve these goals.

To get the audience thinking, Paul posed the question “What is effective communication?” After a few close answers, Paul explained that it is merely when the message sent is clearly understood by the receiver. Therefore, it is vital for managers to communicate simply to ensure that employees understand comprehensively.

As the Australasian workplace is shaped by a “what’s in it for me?” mentality, Leon emphasised that clearly defining the purpose and benefits of the Improvement process should be the starting point for all organisations. This way, employees can become motivated and invested in the Improvement projects from the get go.

However, Leon also discussed that the most important step is engaging and empowering your workforce. According to Leon, managers need to enter a social contract with the workers in order to provide them with a good

working environment and opportunities to perform well.

“If you give them (employees) the opportunity, it is almost a given that they will come on board,” explained Leon.

Finally, in order to successfully implement your Communication Framework, it is vital to conduct **regular toolbox meetings**. These meetings need to be short and simple operational meetings involving the frontline workers. Toolbox meetings are a two way communication device that aligns the company and its employees, encouraging discussion, feedback and sharing of learnings.

Although they may appear simple, effective toolbox meetings involve several crucial elements:

- They should be included in the *daily routine* at a specific time and place to ensure *consistency* (max 10min each day).
- They have to be structured in accordance with a brief and *focused agenda*.
- They need to incorporate *Visual Control tools*, such as production and warranty cost control boards, these will make the meetings easier to comprehend and can ensure that the discussion stays on topic.
- They should *publicise achievements* to promote formal CI through demonstrating success, for example employee issues can be listed on the toolbox meeting board and as they get resolved, the list can be updated to visualise the progress.
- Lastly, it is important to ensure they have a competent Team Leader or Supervisor with the support of a CI Co-ordinator to conduct the meetings. These leaders should facilitate co-operative communication to move the business away from traditional coaching methods to visual and co-operative practices.

Leon then went on to explain the purpose of toolbox meetings at the Kilsyth site. Firstly, Leon exemplified that facilitating cultural and

environmental change was important. The team aim to move from a Supervisor-led to a Leading Hand-led organisation to give the Team Leaders more opportunities to contribute, and help enhance the capability of the shopfloor within the Improvement process.

**Figure 2 – Sample Visual Control Boards @ B&D**



Although B&D’s toolbox meetings have proven effective, they have also faced some challenges along the way. According to Leon, as long as you are implementing change, there will always be some degree of resistance. Therefore, it is vital to effectively communicate the purpose and benefits of the Improvement projects early on to get everyone on board.

Leon’s final words of wisdom were to “be like rust.” By this, Leon meant you need to constantly stick to your plans in order to avoid reverting back to old behaviours should you wish to move forward.

CTPM would like to thank Paul and Leon for sharing their learnings at the Forum. We would also like to congratulate B&D Doors & Openers – Kilsyth for all their achievements to date and we cannot wait to see what they accomplish next!

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