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BELOW THE RADAR

Factors that Steal Tons, Increase Costs and Prevent Change

The Comfort Zone and Improvement Success

At midnight on January 1, we entered a New Year. People gathered in the streets and in their homes around the world to watch fireworks, remember times past and celebrate an expectation of better times to come. The New Year is a time for people to leave behind old habits and adopt new ones. On December 31, millions of us set goals for personal improvement, happiness and success – by choice. We decide to lose weight, save money, make more money, get into shape, stop smoking, eat healthier or be more organized. Even though most of us don't like change, the coming of the New Year is a catalyst that prompts us to **choose change** in our personal lives.

In business, other catalysts cause us to evaluate performance and set new goals for improvement. The annual budget process always includes a look at past performance and proposed changes to improve performance. A change in product demand or supply costs may cause us to adopt different operating strategies to preserve margins. A change in manpower availability causes us to evaluate training programs or automation that had not been previously considered. In each of these cases, a catalyst (internal or external) triggers a review of current practices. This review creates expectations for changes to processes, procedures or decision criteria to get a different result.

As we know, a new personal goal must be accompanied by a commitment to change. It is up to us to get to the gym regularly if our goal is to get into shape. It is up to us to stop eating desserts or have smaller portions if we want to lose weight. Our desire to be different or better causes us to take action, but long term, **we must be committed to change more than we are committed to our old habits or behaviors** if we are to reach a new sustainable steady-state plateau of success, health, happiness, etc. Many people will sign up for gym memberships in January but will stop going to the gym in February. Why? Most of the time, it's not because they made a conscious decision to be in poor shape in February. Most of them will stop going because their commitment to change did not take priority over their old habits, even though they recognized the benefits gained by adopting new behaviors.

Implementing change in a business environment is no different. We often identify new projects that will improve operational, financial and organizational performance. We start down the change path and do OK until we get to the **"change the way we work"** step that sustains improvement. In this step, managers and employees must be committed to change more than they are committed to old familiar processes or procedures. Unfortunately, managers accountable for achieving improvement goals may overlook the value delivered by sustainable behavior change. When behavior change is not emphasized as a critical success factor in sustainable improvement, we often fall short of business goals and wonder what happened. We may buy new equipment that promises a certain ROI, but we never see the return. Could it be that new procedures, behaviors or communications were required to achieve that ROI, but a failure to recognize their importance sacrificed the benefit that could be added by the equipment?

By building behavior change into an implementation plan, we give it a high priority and set an expectation for time dedicated to sustaining new behaviors. We also recognize that people will be required to "leave their comfort zone", but will be moving towards a new one. I believe that the transition to a new comfort zone is one of the biggest hidden barriers to sustainable change (at home and at work). A strong commitment to change helps form the bridge to a new comfort zone and success with sustainable improvement.

Here's the thought for January:

**When people leave one comfort zone, they move towards a new one.
Failing to recognize the transition period as part of the improvement
process is a deal-breaker for sustainable change.**

Kay Sever implements improvement programs for mining and downstream processing facilities. Her approach balances commonly used tools and methods with a focus on value creation and the "people side of improvement". Kay works with every organizational level and department to find the highest dollar opportunities and remove barriers that prevent sustainable change. She helps management teams lead improvement and better execute the budget, capital approvals, incentive plans, communications, etc. See MiningOpportunity.com for details on her services and contact information. Look for the mining edition of her first book "Building An Opportunity Culture – Addressing the Barriers That Steal Profits and Prevent Sustainable Change", available on her website under Products/Books.